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SELF-PORTRAIT OF SIR FRANK BRANGWYN, R.A. (*From the collection of Matthew Walker, Esq.*)

BRANGWYN TALKS

By

WILLIAM DE BELLEROCHE



LONDON

CHAPMAN & HALL LTD

37 ESSEX STREET, W.C.2

Now that I have read this book, I
feel I want to murder Bellbrooke
and burn his manuscript, But
this would be a somewhat drastic
proceeding. As he has recorded
these intimate talks with a
sincere admiration for my poor
effort, & only thing I can say
is, go ahead as my God bless
his venture. Sam Bray, M.P.

July 7 1943



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to A. M. Hind, Keeper of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, for reading through my book in manuscript and for valuable advice. To Lewis Richmond for encouragement at all times and help with the early proofs ; also to F. B. Walker of Chapman and Hall for his personal interest and practical assistance and for producing the book I have always visualised. Finally to my friend Leon A. Terlinden, who has been so closely associated with me in all my activities in Belgium.

W. DE B.

RUSTINGTON,

January, 1944.

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NOTE

The pen and ink sketches by Sir Frank Brangwyn, R.A., which appear in this book, have been reproduced from letters he has written to the author at various times. The sketches were never intended for publication, but the author has been fortunate in persuading this great artist to overcome his natural modesty and allow them to be reproduced.

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(From the collection of Matthew Walker, Esq.)

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THE DITCHLING HOUSEHOLD

BRANGWYN	.	.	<i>The Master.</i>
MRS. PEACOCK	.	.	<i>The Housekeeper.</i>
ROGER	.	.	<i>The Dog.</i>
THE AUTHOR	.	.	<i>A Young Artist.</i>

The conversations take place in the studios, corridors, kitchen, dining-room, bedroom and garden of the "Jointure," Ditchling, Sussex.

The house was part of the property given to Anne of Cleves by Henry VIII. Sir Frank Brangwyn has added considerably to the building which now includes several studios.

The subject revolves round the foundation of a Brangwyn Museum in Bruges, the artist's birthplace.



I

MIDSUMMER, 1934

THE old porter at Hassocks Station helps me to get my cycle off the train. I tell him I'm going to call on Mr. Brangwyn. He gives a sigh and says: "You'll be lucky if you see him . . . he lives the life of a recluse and doesn't receive visitors." Obviously this makes me all the more keen to beard the lion in his den.

In the picturesque village of Ditchling, about a mile from the station—BRANGWYN is a household name. Some speak of him with admiration, others with respect—all acclaim him as a "Grand Old Man." A woman in a shop tells me how to find the house, but I don't quite like the way she says: "You'll be fortunate if you get inside the front door."

I pull open the little iron gate, and press a bell which is heard from the outside. As I look up—the name JOINRURE stands out in large letters. I wait fully five minutes, and a fair young man opens the door. He asks me what I want. I tell him: "I wish to see Mr. Brangwyn."

"Is the Master expecting you?" he inquires doubtfully.

"No. But I've come a long distance to meet him. Will you tell him it is the son of Albert de Belleruche?"

"Just a moment, I'll find out if he can see you. I believe he is resting."

The young man leaves me on the doorstep for another five minutes, and then returns with a smile on his face. "Will you follow me?" he says, and leads me into a small room full of lovely art treasures. This must be a kind of studio, judging by the large table in the middle of the room. I notice coloured chalks, squeezed tubes of paint, old razor blades, rolls of drawing paper, and a pot containing a sable brush nearly two inches wide.

Then BRANGWYN comes into the room. He wears a tweed suit, felt waistcoat, and a large black bow partly hidden under his silvery white pointed beard. Fixing me with his dark penetrating eyes, he asks in a deep voice: "Are you any relation of Belleruche . . . the painter of women?"

"Yes, that's my father."

"Ah, well I'm delighted to meet you."

"And I'm honoured to meet you, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Thank you. Your father is a fine artist. Is he still alive?"

"Yes, he lives in Sussex."

"Well I'm dashed. So near to me, and yet I knew nothing about it." Shaking his head he takes hold of my arm. "So you're the son of Belleruche—what? Come and sit down."

A pair of beautifully engraved buckles are hanging on an oak beam over the fireplace. He feels they require an explanation. "Oh, they're just a little metal work I did when I was young. Not so dusty for a first effort, what?"

"They're quite Renaissance."

"That's funny you should say that; others have told me the same thing." He looks at them afresh. "Yes, yes, I suppose they are—when one comes to study them carefully. I've always had a great admiration for that period—Great Men All."

"Have you done much of this work?"

"Yes, quite a lot. I've had a shot at most things." He brings the conversation back to father and asks: "Has your 'Old Man' done any painting lately?"

"Not much, Mr. Brangwyn."

"How's that?" he exclaims, pushing his fist into his cheek.

"I think father is slightly discouraged to see the crowd of people who paint nowadays—people who have no business to paint."

"I agree with him. It's damned awful. Everyone paints. . . . It's in the air like dancing. Mostly painting to-day is a stunt. Its main purpose is to kick up a stink. In the past the money side was not so evident. At all costs to-day one must create a sensation. It's not the merit of the work but its badness that counts. I heard the other day of a Spanish artist in New York who painted on the *shoulder* of his wife. He might have got a larger surface with a more startling effect lower down."

"Perhaps he didn't think of it," I reply with a smile.

"I can well understand your father getting discouraged in his work," he proceeds. "I feel like it myself, only, if I were to put down my brushes . . . well, well, I shouldn't have much joy left in life."

"Father has produced a great deal of work."

"He must have done. Didn't he present four hundred of his prints to Brussels?"

"Yes. They were much appreciated."

"I should think so. A handsome gift, what?" He lights a cigarette. "Tell me. Your father is French, isn't he?"

"No. English, Mr. Brangwyn."

"I always thought he was a Frenchman. He painted the Parisian women a great deal?"

"And the English."

"But his work is more alive than most stuff done over here. Full of vitality, what?"

"But he's English, you may remember. And his picture *Printemps* was bought for the Luxembourg Museum."

"Well, it's much harder for an Englishman to have a work hung in the Luxembourg than for a Frenchman. Yes, I remember the picture right enough. A Nude."

"That's right."

"A beautifully modelled figure rich in colour. Yes, yes, I can remember the picture well. In fact, I bought a postcard of it at the time."

"You have a good memory."

"Yes, that's one of the things I flatter myself on having—a memory for pictures and places—bad for many other things I fear. It's been jolly useful in my decorative work."

A small brown dog called ROGER comes into the room and sniffs around my chair. Holding his head on one side he looks up with pleading eyes. Brangwyn tries to attract him, and then asks :

"What made your father live in Sussex ? "

"The suggestion of Edward Stott."

"Ah—How did he get to know him ? "

"They were at Carolus Duran's studio in Paris. Sargent had also been there, and later became a great friend of father."

"That's all highly interesting. And, so, Stott persuaded your 'Old Man' to buy a house in Sussex ? "

"Yes. Father had been very ill, and his doctor ordered him to go to the sea. He called on Stott who told him there was a lovely old thirteenth-century house for sale at Rustington. Father bought it. You must come over and see us."

"Nothing would give me greater joy. Unfortunately, I've got into such a poor state of health that I hesitate before I embark on a long journey. Rustington—must be at least a good thirty miles ? "

"I'm not certain."

"I don't think it's any more. However, I'll try and come over as soon as I can get a car. Tell your father I shall look forward to meeting him soon."

"I know he's looking forward to meeting you."

As we continue talking, a Persian miniature hanging on the wall arrests my attention. It is an indescribable blue. I admire it for a few moments, and then Brangwyn asks :

"Did you ever meet Sargent ? "

"Once. I was about eleven, and remember well the studio in Tite Street. There was a fine painting on the right as I went in. It represented some women peeling onions . . . the composition was lovely and reminded me of Frans Hals. In another room, I saw the portrait of my father in a Florentine costume."

"I know the picture. Rather dark in colour, but fine in drawing. Do you possess it?"

"No. It went to the States after the Sargent sale at Christies. But, we have the portrait of father as a toreador."

"Have you? Now, this must have been painted at the time Sargent made his reputation with his picture *El Jaleo*. You know the painting, I presume?"

"I'm not quite certain."

"Yes, yes, you know the one I mean. A Spanish dancer with a lot of guitarists. A fine work, full of life and movement, what?"

"I *seem* to remember."

"Of course you do. Well, that's his best period. A long time before he became the fashionable portrait painter. By the way, what's your father going to do with the picture—give it to a museum?"

"We shall keep it."

"I don't blame you. No, I was only thinking that it was a museum piece."

"I prefer it to the one in Florentine costume."

"Is the colour more beautiful?"

"Yes; the whole pose and everything is more alive."

"Oh, Sargent was hot stuff on a sketch."

"Did you know him, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"I only met him a few times. We never seemed to click somehow. Sargent was too much on the reserve in my company—he wouldn't talk freely. Now, this sort of thing goes against my nature. If I feel that I've got to bottle up—well, I damn well hurry up and clear out. I rather felt that way about old Sargent," he concludes with a smile.

"I appreciate your feelings."

"I'm glad you do. Life is too short if we have to stand on ceremony. I've got no time for this sort of thing—it makes my blood boil to see the hypocrisy of some people. I've knocked about the globe—met some of the world's worst . . . mixed with all sorts of types and people . . . and I can say one thing, Belleruche . . . I've always tried to speak my mind and remain myself." He flattens out his

cigarette in a bowl of Ming pottery which has had a chip and is used as an ash-tray. "What else do you remember of your visit?" he asks, his interest quickening.

"Not much, Mr. Brangwyn. I was very young. One incident perhaps, that might amuse you. Sargent was pouring out tea and eating all the cream cakes. He asked me whether I would like some bread and butter. . . . I said, I'd prefer to have his signature in my autograph album. He smiled, and handed me a sketch done with a few rapid strokes. 'That's my likeness,' he said, and left to accompany my mother to songs by Fauré at the piano."

"It must have been a clever sketch," he replies, chuckling.

"Yes. Every line had a meaning."

"Oh, Sargent was tip-top at this sort of thing. I always think some of his best works were those quick impressions he did in oils usually at one sitting."

I notice Brangwyn's expression changes and becomes animated as he ejaculates: "Wonderful things, what? Oh, the way that man could throw a few rapid strokes on canvas and portray the features of an old Victorian beauty or a Jewess plastered with jewellery . . . and the character . . . Gosh!" He then tries to recall the picture formerly in his collection. "When I come to think of it, I used to have the original sketch in oils that Sargent made for his portrait of old Coventry Patmore—Sargent painted the fellow's head in the most extraordinary way . . . instead of noticing the masterly brushwork that one usually sees in many of his paintings, here, in my sketch——" he stops and cannot find the words. "In this study of mine, the whole lay-out appears different . . . something accidental has taken place, something that made the picture so terribly alive."

His face lights up with excitement as he tries to visualise what Sargent felt when he was painting the picture. "The portrait of this old man——" he continues, "with snow white hair . . . is speaking to you . . . it is a fine thing that arrests you . . . MARVELLOUS, it is——"

The whole time he is speaking, I try and take in all his movements and expressions. He notices me in a half dazed

state, and shouts out: "Wake up, old chap! Is your father doing any lithography in Sussex? He gets a quality from the stone that few artists give you. In my opinion, he stands alone, as a master of the material, what?"

"I'm pleased you think so."

"Oh yes, he's a fine artist. I always admired his work in the Paris Salons."

"But, *you also* have done some fine lithographs, Mr. Brangwyn. I saw some recently at the Brussels Print Room."

"Ah, but they're not like your father's. My works, in many cases, were badly printed—all the richness I tried to give—disappeared and became smudgy and heavy. Some of my early ones, yes; because they were printed by old Goulding, and he was the finest printer we've had—a man who understood the artist's work, and a man who had a respect for it." He throws his head back and clears his eyes from a lock of silvery grey hair which is falling over his forehead. "And does your father still do lithographs?"

"No, because he can't get anyone to help him to clean the stones. I wish you would try and persuade him to take it up again, Mr. Brangwyn; perhaps you could do some together?"

"A dashed good idea. But we should need a press."

"Father has one which printed the works of Delacroix, Daumier, and many of the French Impressionists. It came from the 'Imprimerie Lemercier' in Paris."

"What——" he bursts out excitedly. "Has he got one of *their* old presses?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Well, now you're talking. Let's get on the job and do something good. Lithography is a medium in which you can let yourself go . . . express yourself exactly as you feel . . . one, if not the *only* medium in which an artist can have his drawing reproduced



without any deterioration in his work. It's the finest of all the graphic arts—gives back truly all that the artist puts on stone."

"I wish you would persuade father to do some more work. It seems that his desire to work has gone. I must say he has received very little recognition over here."

"My dear sir, it is always the case. An artist is rarely appreciated in his own country until he's dead. Besides, you mustn't forget that times have changed. Look at the funny stuff they're buying in galleries, nowadays."

"Can you do anything about it, Mr. Brangwyn; write to the Press and tell them what you think?"

"Write to the Press——" he bursts into ironic laughter. "That would be hopeless. . . . It's not that I'm shirking the idea, but one is up against a brick wall—and the only thing for your father to do is to go on painting for himself without worrying about what goes on outside."

"But surely the public would listen to you?"

"Some. But the mass are influenced by all the nonsense that's written about art. My writings would be considered rubbish of the first order. Now, in France, it's easier to start a polemic . . . the *people* are more enthusiastic. When they have acclaimed one as an artist, it doesn't matter a damn what the changes are—they stick to him and remain faithful, what?"

Brangwyn sits up in his chair. His stare makes me uncomfortable. There is an expression of disillusionment mixed with a hint of sympathy for those who will have to face these things. Then, tugging at his pointed beard; his eyes become more and more determined, he takes a final puff from his cigarette and bursts out:

"These same people I'm talking about would have the impudence to tell you that Rubens is vulgar . . . that Boucher and other artists are vulgar. . . . Ha! Ha! . . . and it's no use arguing with them—no use at all."

"But this attitude can't go on, Mr. Brangwyn."

"I don't think it can. But it's interesting to see that a fine Old Master still fetches a big price in the sale room, what? Now, if these 'gangsters' were true to their convic-

tions . . . they should damn the Old Masters—destroy the lot of them and leave room for their friends.” A reassuring smile sweeps over his face as he concludes softly: “But if you or I wanted to get hold of a Rubens or Tintoretto . . . we shouldn’t stand an earthly . . .”

“I still feel you should write a book about this. You have an international reputation, and people would listen to what you have to say.”

“Listen to me——” he bursts out. “They’d tell me to SHUT UP—— There are too many people in influential positions who’d tell the public that Brangwyn was talking through his hat . . . it’s no use, Belleruche.”

“They wouldn’t carry weight on the Continent.”

“Who wouldn’t?”

“Well, the people in influential positions.

“Oh yes, they *would*. You have no idea how things get around nowadays . . . what with the Press . . . and aeroplanes, before you know where you are the whole world knows what you’re up to.” He feels in his pocket for another cigarette—brings out a “du Maurier” slightly squashed, and lays in on the table. “I’ll smoke this when you’ve gone.”

I was asking myself if this was a hint just as he brings the cigarette to his mouth and puts a match to it. Greatly relieved, I begin to ask questions about his work. But at this moment the fair young man walks into the room. He picks up the large sable brush from the pot on the table, and tells him he has prepared everything in the studio for his water-colour.

Brangwyn rises from his chair and gets a few sheets of paper from a drawer which seems full of attractive books illustrated with Japanese woodcuts. He notices my curiosity and puts me at ease by saying: “Yes, we shall have a look at all these one day. I have hundreds of Japanese drawings and woodcuts which I’ll show you when you come round again, Belleruche.”

He then asks the time. It is five o’clock I tell him. “What? And I’ve done no work this afternoon. Still, it’s been interesting talking to you.” He sends the young man to the

studio and gets back into his chair. "I think I'll work on the water-colour in the morning. It's rather late and I don't feel up to scratch . . . I'm tired."

"Is it my fault?"

"No, no, I didn't feel up to the mark when I got out of bed this morning . . . it must be old age. I don't seem to have the energy I had when I was young . . . but the trouble is, when we get older, we have more understanding. When you're young—you don't seem to go into things so deeply."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you're like a little bird on top of a tree, nibbling bits from all the apples and spitting them on the ground."

Calling his dog he starts fondling him. "I've never seen an animal like this 'old Roger boy' for having his ears tickled . . . he loves it." Then he stretches out for a piece of red chalk on the table and makes a few notes on an old envelope. "Where did you say you lived?"

"Rustington."

"Is that anywhere near Littlehampton?"

"About a mile."

"I thought so." He passes his hand over his brow. "Now let me see, I once stayed at a small pub called the . . ." He forgets the name. "Is it the Talbot, or something that sounds like that?"

"I've never heard of it."

"I'm speaking of some thirty years ago."

"Ah—that's another matter."

He remains silent for a few moments as he lets his memory go back. Then suddenly he affirms. "Yes, I'm cock-sure that was the name . . . Talbot. I used to go there with my wife for little holidays. The good woman would sit down and read the newspaper or do some knitting, and I'd bring out my sketch-book and get an old fisherman to sit for me. When the job was finished, I'd give him a bob or two and tell him to go and buy himself a drink." Laughing, he twists his moustache into little curls. "He'd like that, the dear old soul, what?"

"The place has changed a lot, Mr. Brangwyn."

"That's the cursed trouble. All the charm and peace of these old spots has vanished. It's the same wherever you go. If only one could flee from it all—but where can you go?"

"But Ditchling has preserved its charm . . ."

"Yes, but for how long? We remain at the mercy of ruthless ruffians who can destroy the place whenever the fancy takes them . . . bloody awful, what?" He deplores his language and says: "Forgive me—but when I think of these acts of vandalism . . . it makes my blood boil, and I get so angry . . ." softly "I am often apt to forget myself."

Then, changing the subject, he asks me whether father knew many artists in Paris. "Manet, must have been an interesting fellow. Did your father know him?"

"Yes. He's often spoken about him."

"How interesting. And to think that one might have bought his best pictures for a song. No one wanted them in those days. I heard the poor fellow left his studio filled with stuff when he died, and Madame Manet had to get rid of them as best she could. Degas bought a few, and later they had a sale." He brings his head forward and asks: "Did your father know Degas?"

"Yes, quite well."

"Now, *he* was a difficult bird to make pals with—he never seemed to mix easily with people, and was always retiring into his shell. How did your father meet him?"

"Degas visited one of his exhibitions, and bought his picture *Nude combing her hair*. Then he asked to meet him."

"That was a great compliment coming from old Degas, what?"

He notices a colourful note through the window and makes me turn round. "Look at the blue sky, Belleröche! Do you see that white cloud floating like a mountain. . . . Gosh! Nature is the thing."

Looking back into the room my eye alights on an Old Master drawing: A Mother and Child. "Is it Italian, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Yes, yes. Sixteenth century. School of Leonardo."

"It's very beautiful."

"Beautiful——" he repeats. "It's a corker."

The drawing is removed from the wall and Brangwyn looks at it under a powerful magnifying glass. He notices my enthusiasm and seems very amused. "I see, young man, we have tastes in common, what?"

"Yes. Have you many of these?"

"I once had nearly two thousand Old Masters. But I've given a lot away, made swaps, and many have been lost in my travels." He hands me the drawing. "Take this for your collection."

"But I really can't accept it."

"Yes, yes, take it. If you feel any embarrassment about having it—look me out a sketch of your father's."

"I certainly will. A fine one."

"I shall be delighted to have it." He wraps the drawing up in an old piece of brown paper and puts it under my arm. "There you are. You may have a genuine Leonardo——"

As he escorts me to the door I ask if he knows of a place where I can exhibit my woodcuts. He looks up with surprise and says: "What—— you're a wood-engraver?" and shakes his head. "I'm very interested in woodcuts and have done a good few in my days." He calls out to his assistant: "Center . . . Center, where are you?" The fair young man emerges from the passage. "Oh, there you are—I want you to give Mr. Belleruche the address of the Redfern Gallery. Write it down on a piece of paper—the back of an old envelope'll do. . . . Come on, don't let's waste any time, that'll do." He puts on his glasses to see if he can read what the young man has written. "Y-e-es, that's A.I. Now, you do as I tell you, Belleruche—take them over some of your woodcuts, and if nothing comes of it, just remember that you won't be the only one to have been turned down."

Smiling indulgently, he pushes his black silk bow under his silvery beard—leads me to the door and laughs as he notices my racing bicycle blocking up the gateway. "A saucy looking affair . . . what?" Then feeling the wooden rims with his fingers. "Gosh! that's a thing of the past . . . a

museum piece . . . like your father's old printing press. Take care you don't break your neck. You'd better give me a ring to say you've arrived safely."

I turn round at the top of the road and see Brangwyn leaning over the gate. He waves, and then disappears behind the hedge which constitutes the main defence to his secluded home. On my way back to Hassocks Station, I think of the old porter who had said: "You'll be lucky if you see him."



II

WINTER, 1935

LITTLE did I know that I shouldn't see Mr. Brangwyn again for the next six months. I ring up two or three times a week, and always get the same reply : " Sorry, the Master is suffering from septicæmia and is very ill. He will ring you as soon as he's well. He has written to you," and so on. I begin to think I shall never see the " Grand Old Man " again.

After several weeks, an idea comes into my head ; an idea which I feel will enable me to see him after all. I call on the Curator of the Worthing Art Gallery and suggest a joint exhibition of the works of Brangwyn and my father. I point out the interest it would evoke to have an exhibition of two artists both living in Sussex, and the idea is accepted with enthusiasm. The Curator wrote Brangwyn a letter and received his consent within a week.

Then I get a telephone call from Mrs. Peacock (known as

Lizzie), Mr. Brangwyn's housekeeper. She asks me to come the next day and collect the pictures for the Worthing Exhibition. Before ringing off, she apologises for not having asked me over sooner, and adds: "The Master has been so poorly of late."

The next morning, I give instructions at home that no one is to answer the 'phone, in case I'm put off. Just before leaving, I seem to have faint recollections of the 'phone ringing for some time.

Brangwyn is seated at the table eating a fine salad he has just made. He lays down his fork and gives me the same friendly welcome I had six months ago. "How are you, Belleruche?"

"Very well, and you, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Oh, not too dusty."

"I thought I was never going to see you again. Every time I rang up I was put off. It was most upsetting."

He seems sorry about this and replies: "I've been very ill, Belleruche . . . so ill, I nearly kicked the bucket."

"What's been the matter?"

"Oh, the playful complaint . . . a tidy lot of trouble ranging from housemaid's knee to butler's throat."

I accuse myself for having mistrusted Mrs. Peacock on the 'phone. So, he had *really* been ill. I take a chair by the table in the dining-room and give the Master my father's kindest regards. He smiles kindly and says: "Give him mine. Tell your father I'm delighted to have the honour of showing my works next to his beautiful portraits of women." He pauses to light a cigarette. "By the way, have you met this lady Curator at Worthing?"

"Yes, I have."

"She seems a live wire and all hot on the game."

"She certainly is."

Brangwyn fixes me with a look and makes me feel he realises I have had something to do with this project. But his kindly expression shows that he approves of the whole idea. "I should like to meet her," he adds.

"She'll be delighted."

"But when I'm better. I have to take things rather quietly for a few weeks."

He points to a large parcel resting against the sideboard. "There's my contribution to the Worthing Exhibition. You'll find a few good sketches among them but nothing to make a song about . . . nothing really exciting, what?" He pushes his chair back. "Most of my best works are no longer obtainable . . . only a few prints were made and they've gone to museums and friends. The others that I kept for myself have been shoved in corners and I can't lay my hands on them . . . they've disappeared."

"I shall have to get a taxi."

"What ever for——"

"The parcel won't go on the bus."

He appreciates this and says: "Let Lizzie ring up; she knows the ropes and'll put you on to the right man. Just nip along to the kitchen and ask her to do it for you."

I find her making cakes which smell delicious. She takes the tins out of the oven and wipes her hands on a blue cloth—then she goes into the corridor to ring up. I return to the dining-room and start a discussion about Paris, asking how long he was out there.

He lets his memory take him back and says: "I used to go to Paris very often when working for Bing. He founded L'ART NOUVEAU, and I was one of the original band he employed, among whom were, Besnard, Cottet, Toulouse Lautrec, Thaulow, Cheret, etc., and the sculptors, Constantin Meunier, Carpentier and others; also the architect Van de Velde. I designed windows for Bing, and Tiffany of New York carried them out. I also designed carpets and all kinds of things . . . decorated the outside of the house in RUE DE PROVENCE. All these things took me very often to Paris. Later on in my life I used to go and stay there now and again to make sketches—or when I was on my way to some other part of France," pausing a moment to bring his chair closer to the table. "Now Bing was a most interesting man with very good taste. He was largely instrumental in putting the fine works of Japan before the public. He had a wonderful

collection and the de Goncourts used to come and see it. Much of our knowledge of Japanese Fine Art is due to old Bing."

"That's very interesting, Mr. Brangwyn."

"But your father—he was there the whole time."

"He used to come over to England a lot."

"Yes, but he made Paris his home?"

"I suppose he did, Mr. Brangwyn."

He takes an argumentative puff at his cigarette, and asks: "Did he know Prince Troubetskoy?"

"Yes, they were great friends. Father painted a portrait of his first wife, a Swede. I remember him telling me that Troubetskoy was a vegetarian—a man as strong as a bear. He used to carry his colossal statues across the Salon and everyone stood gasping. It was owing to Troubetskoy's influence that father became a vegetarian. But he afterwards heard that he had a brother in Italy who was stronger still and *not* a vegetarian."

"His brother was a painter and came to live in London. I knew him. As you say, a large man. But old Paul Troubetskoy was a fine sculptor, what?"

"I like his bust of Bernard Shaw."

"Er-yes. It's got character, but . . ." he pauses a moment and doesn't finish his sentence.

"But . . . what, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Well, it's not his best work. Old Troubetskoy could do better when he wanted to. Some of his fine works were small figures of people in modern dress—which he used to show at the Secession in Vienna of which we were all members."

"It must have been a very interesting period to live in. All those artists working together in Paris—meeting in the cafés at night and talking over their day's work—watching the people going up and down the boulevards until the early hours of the morning."

"Yes. Everyone seemed to have some definite ideal. They worked because they couldn't help it. There existed an atmosphere between artists in my youth, which to-day, has completely vanished. Everyone excited one another to work.

Troubetskoy, for instance—would walk into a restaurant in Montmartre, and (shall we say, for argument's sake) meet your 'Old Man' seated at a table having a spot of grub. He'd invite him to a game of dominoes. Then another fellow would come along, perhaps a painter, who'd knock off a sketch of them at their little game, what?"

Brangwyn smiles, as all sorts of things pass through his mind. "That's the kind of atmosphere we knew in our youth—and a dashed fine one—which made everyone anxious to get on with the job . . . anything was painted, things that cropped up in everyday life, and some of the fine paintings of the Impressionists were inspired by a little dinner in Montmartre." He pauses a moment to clear his throat. "Ah, those were wonderful days for an artist to live in—WONDERFUL!"

He continues to let his memory flow back. "Manet . . . now, here's a man who was inspired perhaps more than any other by café life. The thing that annoys me so much is when you hear people say . . . 'oh, so and so was fortunate in having a good model. . . . If Manet hadn't found the fat old man drinking a glass of beer he would never have had that *reclame* with his painting *Le bon Boc*.' Well, all that's rubbish. There are hundreds of good subjects to paint . . . the trouble is people don't use their eyes . . . don't look around them or use their imagination. Damn it, if I wanted to take a stroll down the village this very moment, I bet you I could bring back a string of old stagers who'd make a good study to paint. But they're getting rare. Life is full of material for artists and always was."

Pausing a moment to light his cigarette he finds amusement in watching little whirls of smoke floating in the air. "Talking of using the imagination," he exclaims. "Take that smoke in the air—well, I can see all kinds of weird shapes in it changing the whole time—Look! over there—it's like a drawing of Blake's."

The little dog Roger trots into the room. He scratches his back under the Master's chair—rubs his nose on the seam of his trousers and curls up in the basket by the fire. Lizzie

comes and tells me the taxi has been waiting for ten minutes. I collect the parcel of engravings and thank Brangwyn for an interesting afternoon.

My next visit is after the closing of the Worthing Exhibition. Brangwyn is standing by the window of the dining-room and hands Lizzie a bottle of greenish-yellow liquid which she takes to Center who is working in the studio. Then he inquires about father.

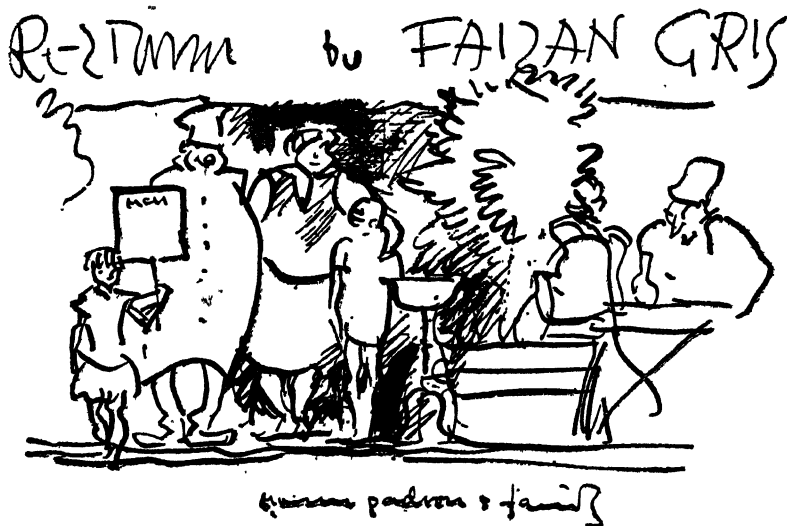
"He's fine, thank you, Mr. Brangwyn."

"I'm glad to hear it. The exhibition has been a great success, what?"

"Yes. Did you see the reproductions in *The Times*?"

"Yes, I have it over there——" He points to the paper lying on the sideboard covered with pencil drawings; probably ideas for a picture. I ask if I may take it away. "I'm afraid I've made some notes on it. . . . I may need them," he replies, shaking his head. "Come and collect it next week, Belleruche!"

He then asks me about the opening ceremony and wonders what was said in the Belgian Ambassador's speech. "Was he pleased with the exhibition?"



"Yes, Mr. Brangwyn. He was impressed by the beauty of your works and said that you and father would always be great friends of Belgium. Both of you had enriched their collections with precious works of art."

The Master covers his embarrassment by saying: "I only hope I shall live long enough to have the opportunity of adding to this gift and making it more worthy of such a tribute . . . what?"

"Your work is very well represented at the Print Room in Brussels."

"In etchings, perhaps? But they have few of my best lithographs . . . very few, and poor specimens at that."

"I didn't find so."

"Perhaps you never saw them." Changing the subject, he talks about a work he is anxious to undertake. "I've been thinking of making a set of Stations of the Cross in lithography. A subject I've had at the back of my mind all my life." He remains silent for a few minutes, and then sits up suddenly in his chair. "I'll tell you the reason why the work was never carried out." A note of sadness creeps into his voice. "I've always wanted to do this, and have thought about it for years, Belleruche . . . years and years . . . and ——" he pauses, and then continues slowly. "One can't set out to depict the Life of Our Lord, without a great deal of thought. It's a subject that should be treated with reverence—the greatest reverence."

"Are you going to carry it out?"

"Well, I thought of doing it in lithography. It seems a medium which would suit the work and lend itself to dramatic treatment—would make people realise the great tragedy—stir up their religious beliefs, their emotions."

"It sounds wonderful."

"Yes, but it would mean a great deal of hard work—and the trouble is to-day, I can't pump up the steam as I used to. I get tired very quickly, and just when I require that final effort to complete the job, I feel all out of gear . . . what?" Then to himself: "Can I do it . . . Can I do it?"

"I'm sure you can."

"Well, there's no harm in trying, anyway."

"How large would they be?"

He stretches out his arms on both sides and exclaims: "Very large—— Well, they've got to be a decent size to have any effect, what?" His face becomes very serious. "I mean to carry this work out before I die, Belleruche. I want to make it my most important work and have made hundreds of sketches for it. The trouble is I haven't got a good model to pose for CHRIST, and I don't know where I'm going to find one. I used to have a marvellous model who sat for the drawings—Cervi—he was called. Now, if I had him to-day, it would be a very different matter," he scratches his brow. "By the way Belleruche, when you see your father to-night, tell him I shall require his advice. He might be able to find me some sheets of rare old Italian paper . . . they'll have to be large, and, if possible, have a slight tint." Then tugging at his beard. "Do you think your father would help me with the printing? I was thinking of that old lithographic press of his."

"I'm sure he'll be only too glad to help you."

"Good. Well, I'll get straight on to the job and try and work as much as possible from my old drawings."

Sinking back comfortably in his jacobean chair, he lets his eyes wander round the room and then back again in my direction. "I was thinking the other day after you'd gone how interesting it would be if your father wrote his memoirs."

"I don't think he ever will, Mr. Brangwyn."

"It's a great pity. It would be an education. The record of an interesting epoch that is finished. If your father sat down in the evening and started to fill up little note books about the things he'd seen, the people he'd met, and all his researches connected with his work. Gummie! it would make a most interesting book."

"Perhaps *you* could persuade him?"

"I don't mind having a shot at it. It'd make a wonderful book—something that people would read over and over again. I know fellows who've done it, but *few* have succeeded

in painting a real picture of the artist's life in Montmartre—except Murger . . . but he didn't deal so much with the art side of things. It's all so interesting, and there were so many wonderful personalities in those days, what?"

Scratching a stain of blue paint on his tweed jacket, he makes an irritating scraping noise as he continues to talk: "Now, get your father to write his memoirs!"

"But you said *you* would do so. Coming from you it would have more effect."

"All right. I'll send him a note after you've gone."

He then looks at his suit. "It seems to me that however tidy an artist is there's always some little bit of paint that catches on. We artists, that is, some of us . . . never seem to do things properly."

I mention that he has a very long finger nail. Holding out his hand he points to his little finger. "This one is always kept long," he explains. "I use it for endless little jobs. Do you know, I can remove the old varnish from an Old Master with it?"

"I'm not surprised. It's a very long nail."

"Well, haven't you noticed the Chinese? They have tremendous nails, some of them," looking at his fingers. "I always feel a hand must be well kept . . . nothing finer than a well-kept hand. Leonardo made beautiful drawings of hands. He'd take endless pains in trying to draw the minutest details . . . always keeping the character. Oh, they're WONDERFUL things, these drawings of old Leonardo——"

He throws the stump end of a cigarette into the fireplace, and continues: "And what about old Dürer, then? If you're talking about great draughtsmen. . . . Gosh! I don't know of any fellow like Dürer for knocking up a fine drawing. Look at the drawing he made of those hands praying—have you ever seen anything more beautiful?" pausing a moment. "A MASTERPIECE—those hands are! There's no modern who can draw like that fellow. Now, take your Impressionists. Fine artists, yes . . . but they've never taken the same care in doing a beautiful drawing."

"But, weren't they chiefly interested in trying to convey an 'impression' of what they saw, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Yes, yes, we all know that. But while you're trying to convey an 'impression,' there's no reason why you shouldn't take a certain fragment of something beautiful, and accentuate *those* things that are fine in your picture . . . just a little something which would give an idea that apart from the general effect of the work, there are also those intricate marvels of nature. Leonardo was fully conscious of these things, and that's why he's taken so many pains in trying to draw them . . . trying to show the beauty of the detail in a woman's *chevelure* or the tiny curls in the beard of an old prophet—that's what old Leonardo would give you."

Brangwyn plays on the table with his fingers, and then continues: "The difference between the Impressionist and the followers of the Old Masters is, that the Impressionists do what they see—without reasoning—and the other gets his impression at work and develops it away from the object. Know what you want to do. . . . Use nature as your material, and build up the work from studies. In this way, you become 'master of the canvas' and can work at intervals." He sums up the argument. "'An impression' is a 'neck or nothing job' and *should*, to be logical, be done at one sitting—the quicker the better, what?"

"I notice the influence of the Old Masters in your work, Mr. Brangwyn."

"I'm glad to hear it. The influence of the Masters is found in all serious work. An artist *must* be influenced by the old. He should study them and try to understand their outlook. They give him an open path to follow, pointing out to him some of the endless ways of seeing beauty in nature, things that without this early training would pass unnoticed——" He raises an eyebrow and clenches his fist with determination. "To-day it's considered all wrong to study the Old Masters," a burst of bitter laughter follows. "And what do the moderns produce—— Ay, Ay . . . what do they produce. . . . NOTHING that'll touch the beauty and craftsmanship of the Older Men." He nods his head. "Well,

shall we put things a little more mildly and say . . . These fellows of to-day have *produced little* that'll add anything to the works done by the Old Masters. Occasionally they turn out a clever sketch, perhaps. But what's a mere sketch in comparison to a noble effort like Leonardo's *Last Supper* or Botticelli's picture of *Spring* . . ."

Sweeping his arm across the table, he picks up a delicate pale blue bowl decorated with flowers and little birds. His fingers follow round the design as he asks: "Where did your father have his studio in Paris?"

"He had several. I remember visiting them with him about three years ago. We had gone to Paris for the Salon, and father took me round the quarters he knew so well. It was after a small but excellent dinner in Montmartre—a restaurant off the PLACE CLICHY. The boulevard was crowded with people walking up and down. Father told me they went on doing this all night long. It was thrilling. The café orchestra was playing a rhythmic Spanish folk tune and the 'prima donna' was dancing to her castanets. She wore a lovely black lace shawl embroidered with scarlet roses and emerald green leaves."

"What a fine subject for your father to paint."

"Yes, but unfortunately, he was in a hurry to leave. He complained of the café being too hot. Just as we were going away I was stopped by an Arab carrying gaudy rugs and coloured silk scarfs. He wanted to sell me an orange tie with green stripes."

"They *do* like to go in for colour, those orientals," he says with a knowing smile. "The joke is that the colour scheme is from Manchester and not the East, what?" shaking his head. "Oh, I've made endless drawings of them . . . queer birds, and they all have the most entertaining stories to tell you. I could listen



to them for hours and the dashed funny thing was they'd nearly always get something out of you."

"Not from father."

"Ah! He knows what their little game is, I suppose."

"Probably."

"You bet your boots he does, what?"

"Well, to continue the story. Father took me down to the PLACE PIGALLE. It must have been half-past one in the morning and yet the whole of Paris seemed awake. We heard music from all the little cafés and *boites de nuit* we passed on the way. When we arrived at the Moulin Rouge, father pointed to a few windows in a building opposite. "It was there I painted my picture *Printemps* . . ." he said. "I used to see the Moulin going round all night long from my window . . . and at about three or four in the morning it was nothing unusual to hear piercing shrieks from a woman calling out . . . 'Assassin! . . . Assassin!—Police!'"

"What a life it was! I bet your father noticed the change."

"Yes, he certainly did. He found that the simplicity of the QUARTIER LATIN had completely vanished and thought everything had become a pose."

"Well, it has everywhere."

Brangwyn gets up from his seat and stands by the window holding both hands behind his back. "Yes . . . times have changed," he continues. "The days of our youth when artists painted because they *had* to paint are over. Art, to-day, well, it's no longer Art . . . it is something acquired by people who want notoriety . . . exhibitionism of the first order. The restless desire for novelty has replaced the search for truth and beauty, what? But tell me more about Paris. You were talking of the Moulin Rouge."

"Yes. We sat on the terrace of a café in PLACE PIGALLE. My father tried to recall the scene as he had known it forty years ago. Then he told me . . . 'You know the picture at home of a dancer stripped to the waist doing a *danse du ventre*. . . Well, she used to appear at the Moulin Rouge inside a thing called "l'Elephant." This was a large

model constructed in metal, big enough to seat several rows of people. The dancer was called Maissa. She was well known to all the artists. I got her to come and sit for me.' Then he spoke of Lautrec. He'd seen him going to the Moulin where he painted some of his finest pictures."

Brangwyn shrugs his shoulders. "It was a very fascinating period to live in, Belleruche . . . exciting, what? I remember that interesting work of Lautrec, you know—two women dancing at the Moulin Rouge." He describes the picture as if he had painted it himself. "The drawing and movement of the work are superb. There's a woman on the right doing a dance of her own. . . . I remember the coat she is wearing—a rich scarlet. . . . It makes a striking contrast amid a magnificent display of sombre greens and bluey-greys in the rest of the picture. It's all so impromptu and typical of the life at the time. I also remember that fine painting of Jeanne d'Avril dancing the *Can Can*. It's a funny thing, but although the dress with its layers of petticoats reflects a certain epoch, the painting will never date. It's a beautiful thing and a beautiful thing is *always* a beautiful thing, what?" Crossing his knees, he asks suddenly: "How can a beautiful thing date——?" Then a pause. "Of course it can't. No fine thing ever dates. . . . It's a silly expression."

He continues to talk about the painting as he lights another cigarette. "Lautrec shows a Japanese influence in his work, particularly in the pictures we've been talking about. I can understand in a way the delight he must have had in portraying the rather sordid and perverted side of Parisian life. It's a curious thing, but the ugly and sordid can have a certain picturesqueness. When you see some of Lautrec's paintings of the Parisian underworld . . . well, I don't say I should like to be in the company of his drinkers of absinthe or drug addicts . . . but I can't help saying they're damned interesting things to look at. The man's purpose in life was to reflect a certain aspect, which, although somewhat sordid and macabre, *we know exists* . . . and if he has succeeded, as Lautrec *did*, and dashed well at that—he has

left behind something . . . not beautiful, but very picturesque and interesting to future generations."

"I agree with you, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Oh, yes. There's no getting away from the fact that old Lautrec was a damn good painter, and a still finer draughtsman, what?"

"Father introduced him to our English night clubs. Lautrec couldn't understand why we made a pose of something that was very natural and informal in France."

"We always like to exaggerate things over here. Abroad, all these things are accidental. It's a very different outlook."

At this point Lizzie walks into the room and brings the Master a glass of hot water, telling him to drink it in one gulp and then take half an hour's rest. The telephone bell rings. "Tell them I'm unwell, and cannot be disturbed," he shouts as he goes to see the time in the kitchen. He hurries back and says: "It's six o'clock, and I've done no work this afternoon."

As I put on my coat, he slips an old bottle of burgundy in my case. "Take this to your father with my kind regards. I dug it out of the cellar the other day. You'd better tell him to try a sip of it first . . . it may have gone bad—I've had it for more than forty years.

Then with a smile as he leads me down the passage:

"On the other hand, it might be a bit of all right, what?"



III

THE STARTING OF A GREAT PROJECT

BRANGWYN has now completed the Stations of the Cross. He tells me on the 'phone that if I come early he will let me have a look at them in the studio. I arrive *very early* that afternoon. The Master himself lets me in and leads me into the dining room holding a magazine in his hand—a Catholic review called *L'Artisan Liturgique*.

"Do you know anything about this review?" he asks hurriedly as if he wants to get something off his mind. He watches me as I look through the illustrations and notices my surprise when I see the name of the Editor. "Anyone you know?" he exclaims.

"Yes, Mr. Brangwyn. Dom Gaspard Lefèbvre is a friend of mine. A Benedictine monk who was staying at a villa in Duinbergen on the Belgian coast. I was at school there and used to see a lot of him. He was preparing an ecclesiastical dictionary at the time and asked me to do the illustrations."

"Well, I never!" he bursts out, his face lighting up. "What a small world it is——" Then he asks: "Did you make the drawings?"

"Unfortunately, no. The monk left for the Monastery of Saint André near Bruges and I never saw him again. I liked him very much. I remember his last words to me. I was borrowing things from him . . . 'Grip-Fix,' note-paper, etc., and he said: 'You must learn to be independent, my boy.'"

THE STARTING OF A GREAT PROJECT

"Well, you should pay attention to those words. There's nothing like being independent in life, what?" He takes up the Catholic magazine again and asks: "How would you like to write an article on Liverpool Cathedral?" I can give you an introduction to Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect, and you could get straight on to the job." He shakes his head and smiles. "It'd be an opportunity of seeing the old monk again."

"I'd sooner write an article on your Stations of the Cross. The Editor might like to reproduce the whole set."

"Ah, nothing would give me greater joy than to see my Stations reproduced in a Catholic magazine. Write to them about this and see what they say. If they're keen on the idea, they might eventually give you the job of English correspondent to the review, with a nice salary attached to it," he finishes, with a smile.

"I'll write to-night."

"It's worth trying, anyway. Give me a ring when you hear anything."

"I'll come over."

"Ah, better still." He thinks the matter over and adds: "No, you'd better give us a tinkle on the 'phone, otherwise I may not be able to see you. The doctor might turn up, or an old aunt from London who has to catch an early train back."

"All right then, I'll telephone. Although I hate the idea of telephoning, somehow . . ."

"Why——" he exclaims.

"Well, because . . ." I start and don't finish.

Brangwyn understands and helps me out. "It's only when I'm unwell that I have to put you off, old chap."

I suddenly get an idea. "Should the monks be interested in the article . . . might it not provide an opportunity for an exhibition of your religious work in the monastery? Perhaps you could present them with some of your religious drawings afterwards——"



"A dashed good idea! I couldn't find a better home for them. These drawings were never done with the idea of being sold. I never like to associate money with religion. It seems all wrong and irreverent. No, I'd sooner let the old monks have them. They could offer up a few prayers for my family when they look at the drawings." Then, modestly, "and perhaps one or two for F.B. when he's kicked the bucket?"

"I will follow the idea through, Mr. Brangwyn. I'll speak to Count Adrien van der Burch about it. He has always been a great admirer of your work, and does a great deal for art in Belgium."

"You fire ahead, and in the meantime I'll be looking out the stuff. They can have cartloads of it."

"That's marvellous."

Then raising his voice. "They can have Madonnas, studies for the Crucifixion, the Entombment, Nativity, and many sketches I made for the great mosaic in the Church of Saint Aidan at Leeds—also, the large full-size cartoons I made for the job. Oh, I've got just the things for them—works I'd be only too glad to find a home for." He jots down a few notes on the back of an old envelope. "You've struck a dashed good idea, young man."

"It may take time to carry out this project. But I shall enjoy doing anything I can to help you. *I know* the monks will love looking at your work."

"Well, some of the works, perhaps. I always feel that if a few people get enjoyment from looking at my pictures . . . well and good. It's enough if you give joy to one person at a time. That one person will influence others, and before you know where you are—a thousand and one people will have benefited from something you've done."

"But I feel——"

"There's no 'but I feel' about it. What I'm telling you is perfectly true. Now, let me give you an instance of what I mean. I was visiting a small village in France with my wife many years ago. As we were wandering about, we came to a dirty looking place which we were told was a museum. We

went in, and I noticed a sketch by Rubens. Without any exaggeration, that picture was one of the finest works I've seen—its memory has haunted me ever since. It was a marvellous picture. . . . Gosh! . . . Marvellous, it was! Well, I've told hundreds of people about it and have no doubt many of them have been to see it." He makes the picture come to life as he goes on to describe it. "I can see the painting to-day, poked away in the corner of that dirty little museum . . . the colour and flesh tints were something of the first order . . . a Masterpiece, what?"

"Did you come across many of these surprises abroad, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Yes, particularly in France, in their country museums. The French like to make you discover their treasures for yourself. They don't make so much show about things as we do over here. But they know they've got them right enough," he concludes shrewdly. Then he thinks of the monastery and how his works would appeal to the monks. "I'd like the Abbot of Saint André to get the same joy in seeing my drawings (however poor they may be) as I had when I discovered that Rubens or rather think I did. I shouldn't be comparing my works to the great Rubens. But it's just to give you an example of what I mean."

"If you were to present any pictures to the monastery, Mr. Brangwyn, we should have to make sure they remained there."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I was wondering whether certain religious orders had a right to dispose of valuable works of art to raise money for the poor."

"Ah, yes. I'm not too sure this is not still being done to-day in certain monasteries. We shall have to get all this cut and dried."

Lizzie comes into the room and brings the Master a glass of water. "Ah, that's better," he exclaims. "My throat gets very dry." And then he remembers a story about a nun. "My dear wife was being nursed in Bruges after a serious accident. She had a nun to look after her—a beautiful

Madonna-like woman very restful to look at. I made a woodcut of her. One day as I was making a sketch through the window, the nun arrived carrying a parcel under her arm—Sister Ursule—she was called. I wondered what on earth the good woman was bringing. . . . Can you guess what it was ? ”

“ No.”

“ She unwrapped a twelfth-century enamel candelabra and gave it me. A rare piece, it was. I was intensely embarrassed and told her to take it back. It was worth a hundred quid or more ! The poor soul didn’t realise what she was doing. I never heard what happened to it afterwards—and whenever I saw her again I always avoided the subject.” He takes another sip from his glass and wipes his mouth. “ The poor nun was anxious to make me a present. Only she never knew the value of what she’d taken . . . she probably didn’t care either . . . the woman had a taste for beauty, and, knowing I was an artist, said to herself—here’s something that’ll please Mr. Brangwyn.”

Lizzie brings a visitor into the room. An elderly person who seems most anxious to meet the Master. Getting ready to leave, I shove all my papers in my case—including *L’Artisan Liturgique*.

Brangwyn winks knowingly as he observes the “ theft ” and whispers in my ear : “ Write as soon as you get back.”

Sister Hildegard of Bruges



"SISTER HILDEGARDE OF BRUGES."

[Facing page 32]

if I remember rightly the circle of Van der Borge
was something like this



IV

GOOD NEWS FROM THE MONASTERY

I go over to Ditchling with excellent news from the monastery. As Lizzie leads me down the passage I meet Brangwyn carrying several large red chalk drawings which he throws across the dining-room table.

"Well—any luck, Belleruche?"

"Yes. Marvellous news!"

"What is it——?"

"The monks wish to publish the article on your Stations of the Cross. They ask for the photos straight away, and from what I gather we shall be able to have that exhibition in the monastery."

"Well, that's funny. I had a sort of feeling things would work out all right. Look——" He points to the drawings on the table of the Life of Our Lord. "I've just dug these out of the studio . . . are they any good?" He pulls them out and picks one up from the bottom of the pile. "And how about this—*Christ meeting his Mother*?"

"Superb, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Well, I think you're too enthusiastic. Still, it's not a bad drawing, what?" he says, shaking his head and rubbing his thumb in the red chalk, producing a half-tone effect in the cloak of Jesus. "A little bit of smudging here and there often helps to improve a work. These little accidents give a certain

warmth and richness to the thing. One has heard of one of our big men who takes his drawings to bed and rolls on them. They are then often taken for Old Masters."

Gathering his sketches together, he darts out of the room to fetch the new wood-block he is working on. "That's *Christ condemned to Death*," he exclaims. "Take hold of it, Belleruche! No! No! this way up, otherwise you'll drop it."

"Is this the block you want me to engrave?"

"Yes, but take care. I nearly wept the other morning when I started cutting it."

"Why. What happened?"

"Take a look at the left corner and you'll see what I mean." He points to the place. "Do you see what happened? Every time I used the engraver in the sycamore wood long streaks came up and cut across the faces. I could have cried when I saw one of them making straight for the head of Pilate." He puts on his glasses and inspects his work. "No—sycamore isn't a success. We shall have to come back to pear-wood. Of course, box-wood is better, but a piece that size would be too darned expensive."

I look at the work he has done during my absence. "It's magnificent! How do you manage to get those very faint almost invisible lines, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Oh, I tried using an old etching needle," he replies, and warns me to take care not to choke the block when I print it. "You'd better take a couple from prints of the work before cutting it yourself," he says, looking into the block with his glasses perched on the end of his nose.

"But I shan't dare to work on it myself. I shall be too afraid of spoiling it."

"Yes, yes, you carry on. You'll make a fine job of it if your tools cut well. But don't forget to take a couple of pulls before you start on it."

"I'd rather not cut it."

"Well, that's damn silly. I shall stop the work if you talk like this. Do as you're told, Belleruche!"

"If you take it that way. I'll cut it, but at your own risk."

"That's all right. I'll take the risk. Damn it, if I'd taken

no risks in my life, I shouldn't have done anything! Do your best, then you've got nothing to worry about if you don't just happen to succeed, what?"

I pick up the block and have another look at it. "I'm terribly excited at the idea of pulling off the first print, Mr. Brangwyn. Shall I post it on to you?"

"No, you'd better bring it over. But I shan't be able to see you for long as I've a lot of work to do."

"What are you painting at present?"

"Nothing much, only trying to finish those stained glass windows for Dublin. I have a fine glass-painter who's carrying out the work and getting a tidy sum for doing it." He takes off his glasses and sits by the table. "But you know what it is, Belleruche, it's difficult to carry out another man's work. The designer should also be the technician—in fact, the job should be more or less done by one man as it was in the old days. They make some fine glass now, but one can't always get what one wants." He shakes his shoulders with vigour. "I should like to do it myself, but it's a whole-time job. Morris wanted to apprentice me to glass-worker's art." Pausing a while. "I've carried out a good many stained-glass windows in my time—Oh, yes! I have! But it takes a devil of a lot of sweat and hard labour to do the thing well, what?"

"But if you were to do it yourself you could experiment and discover all sorts of new effects."

"I know I could. But it's no use . . . no use at all! To do the thing well, one should make the glass like the old workers—making one colour run into another. To-day, they make very fine glass, but it's difficult to find just the sort one wants . . . fiery colours running through the middle, etcetera." He gets excited and makes gestures as if he was carrying out the work. "Gosh! I'd make deliberate accidents in the blending of the colours so as to give richness and variety to the work. Ah, there's no telling what one could do if one had the time and energy."

Lizzie comes through the room to answer the 'phone. Brangwyn throws a hasty glance in her direction and demands

who it is before she has time to pick up the receiver. She tells him it's a wrong number.

"Dash it, this telephone is a curse to one's existence, it is really, Belleruche! When you come to think of the little benefit you get from it, you ask yourself—is it worth it?" Tugging at his beard. "Yes, perhaps, to put people off coming to see you when you're unwell or ringing up the doctor—or again, ordering a bit of fish, what? I must say, it's been quite useful for *that* sort of thing."

"I know something about that, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Now, you shouldn't talk like this. I've only put you off when I've been unwell or too tired to talk."

He picks up the wood-block again and begins to tell me how he would like me to engrave the part he's left undone. Sweeping his fore-arm across the table he acts as if he were engraving the block—pauses a moment, rolls up his sleeve and continues: "Listen! You want to make rich heavy folds over here . . . behind the figures, you can do a little of that funny cross-hatch work you're so good at, but don't go and overdo it as you're apt to at times. Do as I tell you and you can't go far wrong."

"I'll try, but I'm afraid of the long streaks you spoke about."

"Well, you want to use the gouge and leave the engraver and etching needle alone . . . it's too risky." Then he makes one of his observations which invite you to run a risk. "Of course . . . if you feel you can handle the etching needle and get away with it—well, do so by all means."

Brangwyn packs up the block ready for me to take away. He uses an old piece of brown paper, and seems to have a knack of packing things. I've never seen a finer looking parcel. All the creases in the paper have disappeared, and I have a handsome thing to take home. He then visualises the possibilities of the completed woodcuts.

"If you make a success of these blocks . . ." he says, fixing me with his dark frank-looking eyes, "I'll get you to sign them at one end, and I'll put F.B. at the other. If we sell any of them, we'll split the oof——"

"Never——"

"Yes, that's all right. Do the work, and I'll see that you get something out of it."

I then ask what he thinks about a new book on Renoir. I hand him a copy, and tell him it has just been published in Paris. He runs rapidly through the reproductions—many of which are familiar to him as he has seen the originals.

"Quite an interesting little book," he exclaims, and then begins to talk of Renoir. Leaning back in his chair and balancing himself on its hind legs, he begins: "When I was a young chap, I used to think nothing of Renoir. There were no qualities in his work that appealed to me and I just couldn't stick him. But now I realise he's a fine artist. The only thing is, they laud these fellows up too much." Looking at the reproductions, and pausing in front of a voluptuous nude. "I find Renoir makes his flesh look wormy . . . a greasy sort of look it has about it, what?" he remarks, shaking his head. "Here we are—at it again! One shouldn't criticise. It's your fault, asking me these questions . . . and if one criticises, one also admires, as there is good in most things. One is prone to criticise those one loves . . . it's the silly over-praise or condemnation one reads that at once starts one criticising. Damn criticism, anyway! It's of no use . . . the job is done. . . . Then get what pleasure you can out of it. To criticise it isn't going to alter it, anyway. But when old Delacroix paints a nude, he creates around it an interesting environment—Renoir merely paints a nude . . . and the only reason he has is to make it look nude—damned nude! That's all very well, but a nude is not always beautiful, and when you look at those nudes he painted, well, they're nothing more than French prostitutes. He seems to enjoy painting them desporting themselves in more or less lustful attitudes—like so many modern artists do. . . . Awful it is. The moderns give us all the nastiness of reality. Now old Delacroix used nature for a purpose. He'd say, you can't improve nature, so why bother to imitate it the whole time? To-day the tendency is to give a realistic conception of something that's bad." He takes another look at the book

and throws it on the table. "Now, take Manet for example. He's never commonplace—and yet when you look at some of those nudes by Renoir . . . well, you can't help feeling there's something vulgar about them, what? And we're told old Renoir was a decent living sort of man." He is silent for a moment, and then continues: "The best things he ever did were those boulevard scenes and pictures such as the *Box at the Opera* and the *Moulin de la Galette*. These works, in my opinion, are very fine. . . . Splendid, what?"

"Would you say Rubens was vulgar, Mr. Brangwyn?" He flares up and almost loses his temper.

"Rubens——" He repeats the name three or four times and exclaims. "Rubens . . . is one of the finest artists that's ever existed. . . . Rubens—well, there's no comparison with a man like Renoir."

He then begins to explain some of his paintings. "It's true, when one comes to think of it, that Rubens was accused of sexuality in his art . . . but that's all rubbish." He tries to think of an explanation, and proceeds:

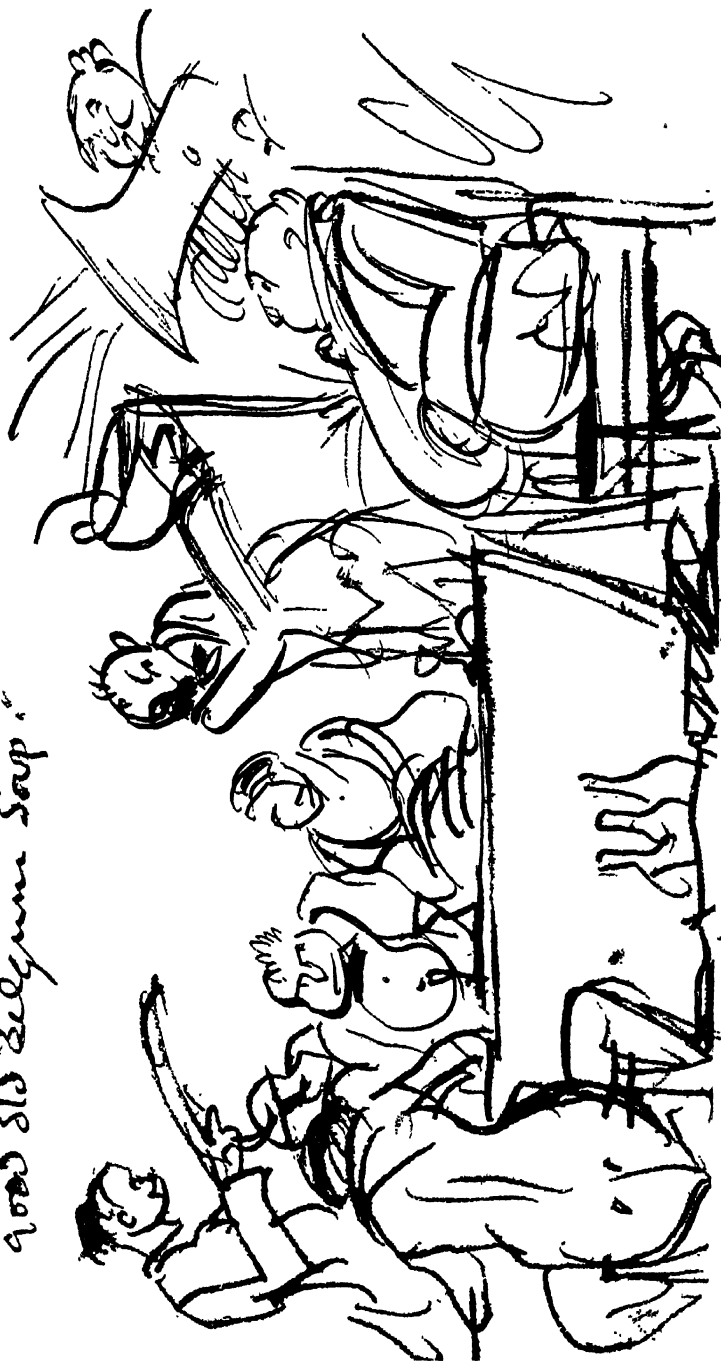
"The woman's backside in a Rubens is no more important than the melon or the goat, and then it is part of a grand design. But with Renoir . . . it's only the woman's backside staring you in the face!"

The conversation now turns back to Bruges and the exhibition at the monastery. Brangwyn tells me he would like to know what has happened to some etchings he presented many years ago which were placed in the care of Monsieur Louis Reckelbus, curator of the Museum. He suggests I go and call on him.

"It would also be an opportunity to visit the Monks of Saint André," he bursts out, "and I'll give you an introduction to Sir Paul Lambotte, Hon. Director of Fine Arts for Belgium—a decent sort of fellow—very genuine, but a bit of a diplomat, what?"

"I remember meeting him at a banquet given by Count Adrien van der Burch in father's honour at the time of his exhibition. I did not speak to him much but remember him asking whether I knew you——"

GOOD OLD BELGIAN SOUP.



"GOOD OLD BELGIAN SOUP."

"Ah, what did you say?"

"That I should like to very much. I found him very broad-minded, but he doesn't admire the distorted works now being shown at the Galerie du Centaur in Brussels. He told me he had a fine set of your etchings hanging in his house in the RUE D'EGMONT and invited me to go and see them."

"Did you?"

"No, I had to get back to England."

"Well, here's an opportunity for you to go and call on him when you go to Bruges. I'll give you a little present for him . . . an etching or two and a copy of my book on the House of Lords panels.* He may not know about them, what?"

Brangwyn gives me a searching look and wonders whether Lambotte has heard about the story. I don't like to tell him that the news of their rejection had reached Belgium, but I give him a hint without dwelling too pointedly on the subject.

"Yes, Mr. Brangwyn, I'm afraid so. But he thinks you're one of the greatest etchers of all time. He wonders what has become of your lovely pictures of Persian Markets?"

"All gone to museums."

"That's what I told him."

"And what did he say?"

"He wished they had some of them in the Brussels Museum."

Passing his hand through his silvery white hair, he wonders whether he might be able to find them a picture. "When you come back from Bruges, Belleroyche, I'll let you know what there is in the studio. Perhaps one might find a picture for the Brussels Museum—but it's no use doing anything until you've found out if they're still keen on getting one, what? Do this diplomatically. I should hate the Belgians to have the impression I'm pushing myself. I'm only thinking that they might like to have one."

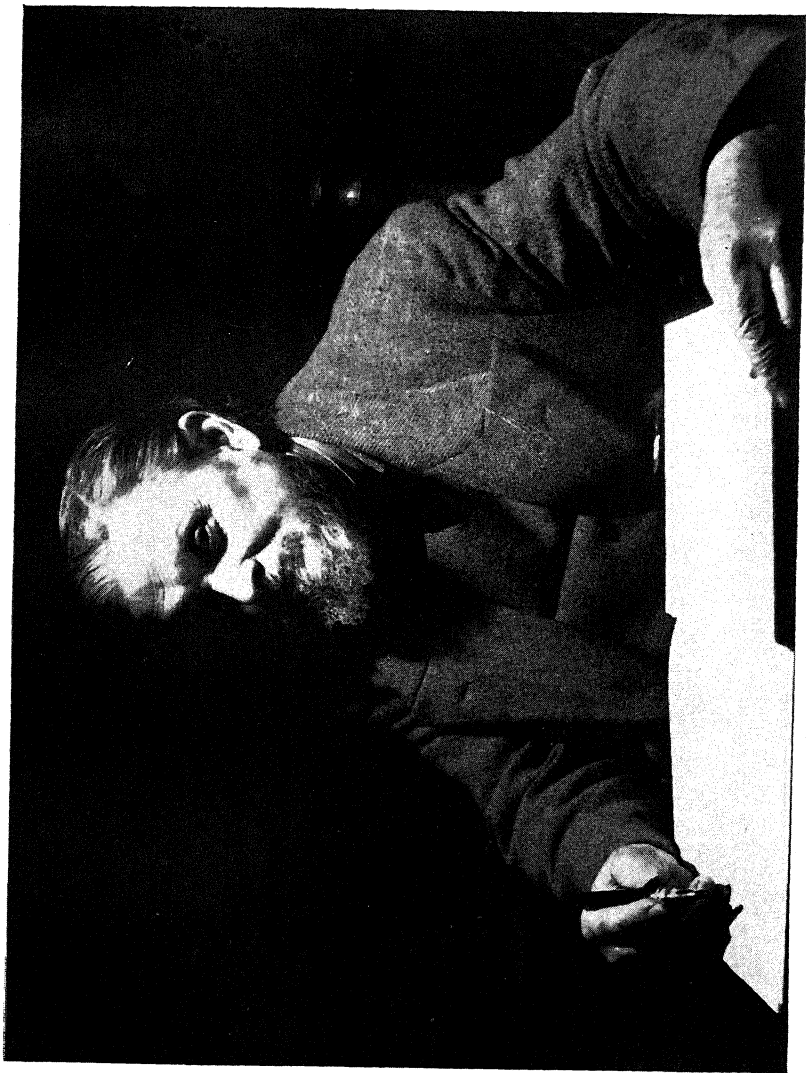
Brangwyn shows signs of fatigue. I collect my hat and coat, ask him to post me the things for Belgium as I should like to leave very soon. He promises to let me have every-

* THE BRITISH EMPIRE PANELS DESIGNED FOR THE HOUSE OF LORDS by FRANK BRANGWYN, R.A. (*F. Lewis, Publishers, Ltd.*)

thing in the next few days and says he'll write to me a lot when I get there.

"I wish I was going with you, Belleruche. Nothing I'd like better than to see Bruges again. It's a wonderful little place."

As he leads me to the front door he asks for my Belgian address so that he can send me a postcard which I'll receive on my arrival. I tell him, THE MEMLINC HOTEL. He shakes his head." You're starting on the right lines, old chap." Then closing the door. "Good luck. Give my kind regards to your father."



DEDICATING ONE OF HIS BOOKS TO LAMBOTTE.

[Facing page 40



V

THE MONASTERY OF SAINT ANDRÉ

I GO and see Brangwyn after my return from the monastery in Bruges. Lizzie lets me in and leads me into the dining-room, leaving the door half-open as she goes to tell the Master of my arrival. Roger pokes his head through the aperture, ruffles his hair, and gives a loud bark.

A few moments later a voice shouts down the passage :

“Rubbish, he’s not back already !”

Brangwyn pushes the door open and exclaims : “What—back already ? So the monks let you get away from the fold ?” He looks at Roger. “So they’ve allowed our friend Belleruche to get away . . . we quite thought we’d lost him—didn’t we, my little Roger boy ?” Then, raising his head in my direction : “Sit down, Señor, and tell us all the news ! Sit over at the end of the table and let’s see if you’ve developed any signs of becoming a monk . . . what ?” An old habit of placing his visitors in a strong light so that he can study their expressions as they speak. He notices my long parcel and promptly asks what’s inside it.

“Oh, just a Bruges *speculoos*—a biscuit for Roger. It’s moulded in the shape of an old peasant. . . . Look, Mr. Brangwyn ?”

The parcel is unpacked and the grotesque looking object placed on the table. He gets up from his seat, and with

a large grin over his face, hangs the *speculoos* over the fireplace. Roger comes and takes a sniff. "Now, that's enough, that's enough old fellow. The little rascal nearly got it, and it looks so nice on the fireplace." He shakes the *speculoos* in front of Roger to teach him a lesson. "He's a frisky bit of goods." And then turning in my direction. "Tell me all about the monastery." He breaks off a bit of the biscuit and starts nibbling it. "Not bad stuff this *speculoos*."

"May I try a piece?"

"No, it looks decorative. Tell me about the monastery."

"Well, on my arrival, I made friends with two monks who were brothers, both very different in temperament. The monks promised to help with the exhibition of your work. They propose letting us have the large hall of the college adjoining the convent and also the cloisters. Some of these are called *cloture*, which means, women are not admitted."

"Well, that's all right. They'll have to say good-bye to their husbands when they arrive at the *cloture* or whatever you like to call it. For argument's sake, let's call it the 'forbidden cloister,'" he smiles. "That sounds rather good, what?" and looks up with an eye catching the reflection of the light. "The only hitch is that the good ladies may feel the monks will keep their husbands in the fold . . . mind you, this idea might tickle the fancy of some of them."

Lizzie brings him a glass of water. "Ah, that's better. Now do you suppose there'd be enough room to show a tidy collection of work without making use of those 'forbidden quarters'?"

"Certainly. I don't see why we're letting this question worry us."

"Well, I never mentioned the *cloture*. Now, did I— So why drag me in?"

He takes another sip from his glass and asks impatiently: "Now, come on; let's hear the rest of your story. Time is getting short and we've a lot to talk about."

"Let me tell you one more thing before we change the subject."

"Well, what is it?"

"The only woman permitted in the *cloture* is the Queen of the Belgians."

"Ah——, the Queen?"

"Yes, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Tell me, did you see the Benedictine Father who published your article on my Stations of the Cross—the fellow you refer to as a Greco. You know, the chap with a sunken face, large nose and deep-set eyes?"

"Yes, he was there. I thanked him for publishing the article and now he talks of making a special 'Brangwyn Number' to run in connection with your exhibition."

"That's all right. We'll have to keep in with him about this. See that he makes a decent job of it and sets out the illustrations in the proper way."

"I thought perhaps you'd select the photographs yourself."

"Yes, I'll look out what I've got."

"May I help you?"

"You wouldn't know where to find the stuff. What you *can* do is write to the monk and tell him Mr. Brangwyn is delighted with the idea and thanks him for his kindness. Tell him I'm honoured."

"I will, certainly."

"And that I hope to find works good enough for reproduction in his publication. You might tell them also that Mr. Brangwyn is not out for any notoriety; he's had all he wants and the only reason for this article is to let the monks see some of his work. As for exhibitions, I'm sick to death of them, but this is some particular occasion. It isn't an ordinary art exhibition. See that you make that clear." He takes a blue pencil from his ear and starts to make a few notes for my letter. "Now, make this bit strong——" he exclaims. "The only reason for this manifestation in the monastery is that Mr. Brangwyn would like to give joy to the monks and the people of Bruges—that sacred city in which he saw light for the first time. Then you continue to say that if they (the monks, I mean) wish to make a 'big do' of it . . . all well and good. They can fire ahead, what?" Sighing, he passes his hand over his beard, tugs at it gently, and brings it into a

point. "So the old monks are interested in my works? It's damned nice to know this, particularly as I'm a Roman Catholic and my parents had a lot of artistic connections with Bruges. The only thing that worries me is I feel the works won't be good enough; most of my best stuff has gone to museums all over the world. However, I think I can find them some early sketches and a few decorative drawings and water-colours. Talking of decorations . . . I have a few of these left . . . sketches I made for the *Empress of Britain* and the House of Lords murals. They could have these if they liked? They may not be religious in the strict sense of the word, but what's irreligious in sticking up a drawing of a negro baby suckling from his mother's breast, or a few monkeys swinging on a branch?"

"Nothing wrong that I can see."

"That's what I feel about it."

I then ask if he prefers doing murals to other works. Thinking the matter over for a while, he replies: "There's nothing finer than a good bit of decorative work to do. But the trouble is I've not always been in a position of choosing my own work. I've sometimes had to accept a commission from a ruddy company director who had no taste at all. But even then, there's always a way of getting interested in a job, even if at first it doesn't seem interesting. I've known fellows doing work without much enthusiasm and then suddenly developing a real thrill in the job . . . and do you know, those fellows ended up by performing miracles, yes, miracles!"

He draws himself up to the table and sits back comfortably with Roger curling up at his feet. "Now, tell us more about your experiences at the monastery, Belleruche."

"I'll begin with the little monk who opened the door. A funny old chap who asked me what I wanted. I told him I'd come to stay at the



monastery on the invitation of the abbot. He glared at me for a moment, grabbed hold of my suitcase and carried it down the cloister to a large iron gate. He produced a bundle of keys from under his black cassock and unfastened the lock. We walked down another long cloister and heard chants which gradually grew louder and louder, . . . *Benedicat vos Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus*. The little monk hurried on and made signs for me to catch up. I did my best, but tripped up in front of a large plaster statue of a Saint. 'Shu! Shu!' came from the top of the stairs. Reaching the next floor we walked along a narrow passage with doors dedicated to different saints. I remember . . . St. Ursule, St. Urbanus and St. André. The monk put me into a room at the far end of the passage—St. Hugo was printed over the door."

Brangwyn stands by the fireplace with both hands in his pockets. "I wish I'd been with you, Belleruche. Tell us what happened inside the small room."

I begin to describe the scene of how the little monk went and opened the windows. "He had to let in the air. Then he put up a wire netting which he said was to prevent mosquitoes coming in from the sycamore trees across the road. I looked out of the window and saw a magnificent alley of trees, huge sycamore trees all sweeping in the same direction. A wonderful study for one of your etchings, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Ah, yes! . . . yes, yes, YES! There's nothing finer than a whole lot of trees."

"Well, as he was putting up the netting I looked around the room and saw a small iron bed, a *Prie Dieu*, a round table, strewn with notepaper bearing curious headings, and then something that caught my eye, something that gave warmth of colour to the bareness of the room. . . . two small colour reproductions: *The Nativity* and *Crucifixion*. As I began to unpack my suitcase the monk told me he had to go into chapel but soon another monk would come and see me. He hoped I would make myself comfortable and feel at home. He wanted me to enjoy my stay at the monastery. Then, I suddenly felt terribly depressed, cut away from the world—a terrible feeling! No one to talk to, nothing to do

except write letters and think or pray. I sat down and started writing to you but couldn't concentrate. I hated the idea that I might be detained in the monastery for months when, in reality, I had come for two or three days at the most. I thought of all those photographs you wanted me to take . . . the monks in the cloisters, and the ones who might have fine heads for you to draw. But I couldn't do anything. I was stuck in a small room like someone who'd done something wrong—a convict.

"As all these gloomy thoughts were passing through my head I felt a gentle pressure on my shoulder. Turning round, I saw a tall, fine, aristocratic looking monk with a long white beard. He began to talk in English . . . 'I am charmed indeed to make your acquaintance, Mr. de Belleruche. We have corresponded for so long. . . . Ah! Ah! Ah! and now we meet!' . . . He then took hold of my hands and continued: 'Let us first of all get to know one another a little, and then we shall talk of Monsieur Brangwyn and all the kind promises he makes for our monastery.' He sits down at the end of my little iron bed and gives me a message from the abbot. 'You'll be happy to know that the Reverendissime Père Abbé asks me to offer you his welcome to the Monastery of Saint André. He refers to you as the adopted son of the famous BRANGWYN, and says that he hopes to have the pleasure of meeting you after our mid-day meal. You will see him go into the refectory. I will point him out to you.' He gives me a gentle tap on the back, and whispers: 'But don't hold him up long. The Père Abbé has to be in the refectory before the monks are permitted to sit down.'

"And some of them no doubt hungry," interposes Brangwyn as he gives me a friendly wink: "I had no idea of what I was letting you in for. I knew it would be an experience, but never thought the monks would admit you to their private life, what? Dashed interesting, it all is."

"But there was something I didn't quite like, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Ah—what was that?" he demands, drawing his chair up to the table.

"Well, the monk said something about having to leave for



WILLIAM AMONG THE MONKS.

"WILLIAM AMONG THE MONKS."

[Facing page 46

the Belgian Congo and asked whether we would be prepared (in case of a gift) to divide part of the collection and give some of the works to the Benedictine Monastery out there so that the natives could see your work?"

"What's that you're saying? Congo . . . Congo—why the CONGO?" He clears his throat. "I thought your friend the monk was going to help us with the Bruges affair, and now he proposes to pack up and leave for the Congo?"

"I must say his remark startled me a little. I told him I had come to Bruges to arrange an exhibition of your religious drawings at the monastery and for the time being was going to concentrate on this project."

"And what did he say?"

"He was, sorry he'd ever mentioned the Congo. He particularly asked me to take care not to give you the impression that he wasn't keen on the exhibition. He said he would stay on at the monastery purposely to help with the arrangements."

I look up and find a very curious expression on Brangwyn's face. He seems to have lost complete interest in the conversation, as if he was following an idea in his mind. Then suddenly he bursts out:

"I shouldn't mind doing something for the Congo. I'm speaking, mind you, of when we've finished with Bruges."

By the tone he uses he gives the impression that the exhibition isn't half so interesting as creating murals for the natives.

He then passes his hand over his forehead and appears a completely different person. There is something about him that makes me feel he is unlike anyone else . . . he is talking to me and yet he is miles away in a little world of his own. His face becomes all animated as he exclaims:

"Think of the wonderful decorations one could make for the natives—fruit . . . plants . . . birds—Birds of every description . . . birds bobbing out of the fine blue skies . . . lovely plumage . . . intricate plumage that would have fascinated old Benozzo Gozzoli. If I were only a few years younger I'd have gone out there and worked right on the spot, painting all sorts of things for the natives. Mostly, these

Africans have a love of art and design that should be developed . . . maybe with astonishing results, what ? ” He begins to make a drawing on an old book jacket. “ I’d shove in some native women carrying their offspring . . . babies suckling from their mother’s breasts, women carrying fruit . . . stacks of it in baskets and over their heads—monkeys in the trees spitting out coconut—Ah, if only I were younger! You may remember I did a whole set of Stations of the Cross in tempera for the Leper Colony, but I fear they weren’t up to much . . . and yet I was told by Father Ryan (the priest in charge) that the natives liked them.”

He shows me the sketch which rather reminds me of his House of Lords decorations. I try to put it in my case, but he quickly pulls it out again and says : “ I may need this one of these days.”

“ Not until we’ve finished our work in Bruges.”

“ Well, who was it who spoke to me about the Congo and got me all worked up about the idea—— You, Belleruche ! You put ideas into people’s minds and get upset because we lose track of the subject. It’s your fault, so shut up ! ”

“ I’m sorry, Mr. Brangwyn. But you must realise that my present ambition is the creation of this museum.”

“ Of course I do, yes, yes.” He relaxes, and asks for more about the monastery.

“ I forget where we got to.”

“ The bit where the monk brings you a message from the Abbot.”

“ Oh, yes. Then he left the room, calling out in French ‘ *à toute à l’heure.* ’ A few seconds later I peeped out of the door and saw him sailing down the passage. Reaching the stairs he turned round and caught me in the act ! I was most embarrassed.”

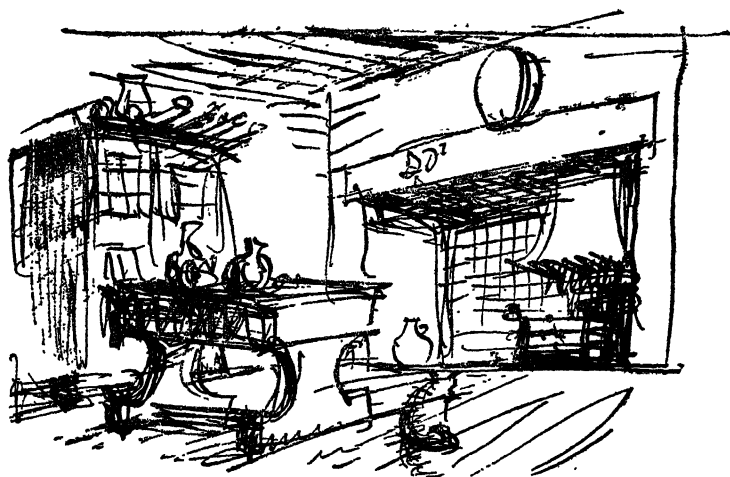
Brangwyn doubles up with laughter and exclaims : “ If you *must* do these things, Belleruche, try to be more careful, what ? ”

Lizzie comes into the room and says the last bus will be leaving in five minutes. He rushes me off and sings out from the gate : “ See you to-morrow afternoon to hear the rest——”



The Refectory. good soup & good bread (see page 97) as P.B. Kenning

"THE REFECTORY, GOOD SOUP, REAL BREAD AND GOD'S BLESSING ON ALL."



*you could make a wood
cut of the room.*

VI

LIFE WITH THE MONKS

As I arrive at the Jointure Mrs. Peacock waves a coloured duster from one of the bedroom windows and asks me to come in. She can't open the door as she has some work to do upstairs. I walk into the little studio on the right, take off my hat and coat and proceed into the dining-room.

Brangwyn arrives holding a small drawing in his hand :

"Heigh ! Heigh ! who let you in ?" he calls out as he walks up to the window and begins to scratch the drawing with a broken piece of razor blade. "Rather a ticklish job I've got here. Now, be a good fellow and skip along to the other room ; I'll be with you in a moment, Belleruche."

I ask if I may watch this little operation which promises to be instructive. Brangwyn looks up with an expression of amusement as if he isn't too sure of his experiments. "Well, please yourself. You'll have to take the blame if I cook up the whole show. I'm trying to see whether a bit of the original work can be revived, but the drawing has been badly re-

painted." He points to certain parts of the work. "That wants coming away, and so does this and all that heavy background."

A silence follows as the experiments proceed. "Ahum! Ahum! this isn't coming up to my expectations. These things are best left alone." He raises an eyebrow and shuts the other eye. "Do you realise that this drawing is reputed to be the real thing, said to be the original sketch made for the *Ugly Duchess* by Quentin Matsys?" He looks up a moment and catches my astonished expression. "You seem to doubt this, young man?"

"Oh, no. I was only wondering how you were going to revive the original work."

"Well, give us a chance! These things are difficult to foresee at this early stage. Supposing you shove yourself out of the light—I could get on with the job."

He doesn't seem satisfied with the result of his efforts. "That's funny, dashed funny! there's nothing underneath—and yet, you can see this has been a good thing in its day, what? I'm told that the man who last had this drawing paid a vast sum of money for it. It's a well-known work by Quentin Matsys and has all sorts of pedigrees, been in the collection of Fairfax Murray who had a great knowledge in all matters of art and had some wonderful stuff."

He tries the blade of an old pen-knife which he produces from his pocket. "No! . . . No! . . . no, no, no! This piece of background isn't the original work. Someone has messed it up. It all wants coming away." A silence follows as more experiments are being performed—then comes a loud: "DAMN IT, I've gone too far—and if I'm not ruddy careful, I'll make it a damn sight worse! Now take the lower lip of the old duchess . . . you're not going to tell me this is the work of a Master, are you? Mind you, we all know the 'old girl' was an ugly bit of goods, but this is too much. Come on, let's leave the thing alone." He lays the drawing on the table and then picks it up again. "Funny how a good thing is always a good thing," his face lights up with a smile, "even when you've only got a skeleton of the

original work, what? Why can't people leave things alone? If you have a beautiful work, you should treat it with reverence——and yet, what am I doing?" Nodding his head: "The whole business is slightly comic, it is really."

He looks at the drawing under a powerful magnifying glass which he brings out of his pocket. "Ahum! Ahum! It's no better—is it?"

"Perhaps a little more harmonious, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Rubbish! It's worse than when I first picked it up. That's the curse of not leaving things alone. Gosh! what a sight the 'old duchess' looks——"

He bursts out laughing as he lays the drawing on the table and walks briskly along the passage to the dining-room. "I say, old chap, tell us how you met the Abbot."

Taking a position in front of the electric fire, he stands with both hands behind him and Roger as usual in attendance.

"I forget where we got to?"

"Well, the bit where the monk had left the room. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes. I was collected later and introduced to the Abbot. He was a fine person."

"Had he a good head, noble features?"

"Yes, full of character."

"What sort of age?"

"I should say about fifty. A sensitive man, full of vitality. He's travelled a lot."

"Oh, really?"

"He goes to the Benedictine Monastery in China every year and brings back Chinese paintings which he hangs on the walls of the cloister leading to his room."

"Are they any good?" He looks in my direction searchingly.

"Decorative; but not the early type. They don't touch the ones you have upstairs in your studio. They haven't got that indefinable something which all those early works have—simplicity and dignity so characteristic of early Oriental art. Neither have they the powerful touch in handling. Still, they're quite attractive and brighten up the cloister."

"Well, perhaps I might give the Abbot one or two pieces from my collection? No doubt, the old fellow would be rather pleased, what? I could look out a few bits that might tickle his fancy." He puts his little finger to his forehead. "Yes, I've got one or two real corkers he could have!" Then, pausing a moment: "I've no doubt the old Abbot is a bit of a connoisseur."

"I'm sure he is."

Brangwyn asks if the Monastic Life appealed to me. I tell him: "Yes, I found it very inspiring. But it played on my emotional side. It was Life from the artistic point of view."

"Ah, the emotions," he bursts out. "Yes, they certainly play on fellows who paint. For instance, it's so strong with me that it's become one of the reasons why I can't pray in church with a lot of people around me. There's too much to distract one the whole time. No, you go to pray and gain wisdom." He frowns for a moment, and then asks me to tell him what happened inside the refectory.

"Well, we went down the cloister and saw monks sitting between stone pillars, gazing in our direction. Others were wandering up and down—some reading prayer books or whispering to one another and giving me a little smile as we passed. Then an elderly monk with a long white beard came along—I was told he was the oldest monk in the monastery. Another followed—a Chinese. I was told he'd joined the Benedictine Order when his wife died."

"A Chinese, what?"

"Yes. He'd been ambassador from China to various countries. When he was appointed to St. Petersburg, he married a Belgian, a Roman Catholic, who was lady-in-waiting to the Empress. Later, when he came to Belgium, his wife died and, wishing to remain faithful to her memory, he joined the Benedictine Order of Saint André. He wrote to King Albert and told him of his intentions. The King, deeply moved by this gesture, wrote a touching letter to the Chinese, who, now over eighty, lives the life of an ordinary monk. When he entered the monastery he asked the Abbot whether he would be permitted to have some hot

water in the mornings until he'd become accustomed to the cold water used by the other monks. His request was granted, but he soon asked that he should be allowed to have the same treatment as the others. To-day, he gets up at four in the morning and attends all the religious ceremonies."

"What a decent old stick he is. I'd like to meet him. Have you a photograph or something to give me an idea of what he looks like?"

"Yes, a photograph."

I fetch it out of my case. Brangwyn takes it to the light and exclaims: "What a fine head he's got. So that's the monk. Look at his hands! I'd like to make a drawing of them, they're perfect." He lays the photo on the table. "There's no getting away from the fact that these Orientals have something about them that is extremely fascinating."

He looks at his own hands which are rather similar in shape to those of the Chinese. . . .

Catching my inquisitive look he tells me: "Now although I'm no longer a chicken, my hands are still pretty supple. You'd be surprised to see all the things I manage to do with my fingers . . . even at my age." He waves his hand in the air. "You see that hand—well, if I wanted to . . . I could get it inside an old pot and out again without the slightest effort. I could get through the hole of an old guitar and pick out the label without injuring it."

Leaving the room for a few moments, he returns with an old musical instrument and begins to give a demonstration. "Look! I'm going to take out the label from inside." Whistling a little tune he gets his hand in without any difficulty. "The next move is to find the label." I hear his nails scratching the wood, and a disappointed expression flits across his face. "There's no bloody label to fish out!" he cries.

Brangwyn thereupon changes the subject and asks whether the Chinese would like some works of art to hang in his cell. "How about giving him my Chinese paintings? He'd know how to appreciate them and 'd realise the beauty and rarity of the things, what?"

"I'm sure he would."

"Well, next time you go to Bruges I'll give you one or two to take over with my respects."

Mrs. Peacock brings in a tray with tea, adorned with large slices of home-made bread and butter, plum jam, four small rock cakes with lots of currants in them. Then the talk turns naturally to the food at the monastery. Brangwyn sees me enjoying my bread and butter, and wonders whether the monks like good food. "I've always heard that monastic food is rather austere—am I correct?"

"Very difficult to digest."

"Yes, but good plain wholesome stuff."

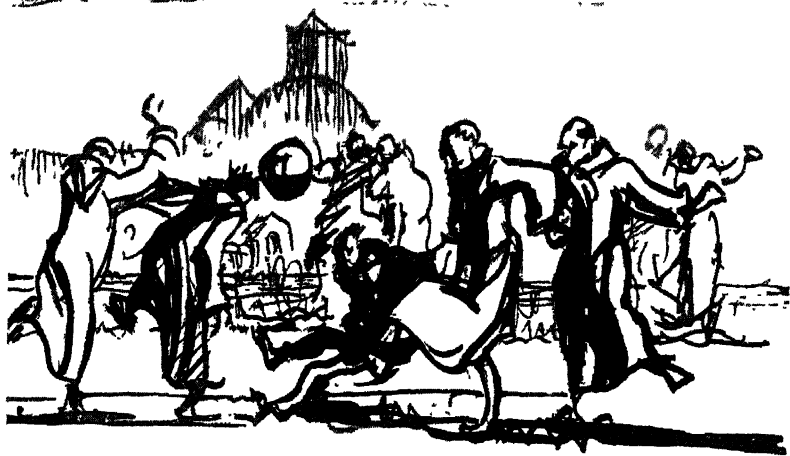
"Too solid. Another thing—I always like to know what I'm eating and could never make out what they gave us for meat or what they put into their soups. Once I nearly choked. I was taking my soup when I noticed the Abbot (who was sitting at his solitary table at the top end of the refectory) staring at my hands. Then something caught in my throat . . . a bit of roughage, all spiky that wouldn't shift. . . . My next door neighbour—a Jesuit priest staying at the monastery—observed I was in difficulties and poured me out a drink. I took a sip of it . . . a kind of diluted beer. When I recovered a little the Abbot was still looking at my hand. I realised at length what was the matter. He had noticed a large ring I was wearing—a green stone almost identical to the one on his finger. I gave him an understanding smile, but he stared at me for a second and then looked down."

"The Abbot was probably thinking what the monks might say after seeing you wearing something that to them meant a High Religious Order, what?"

"That's what I feared."

"But you shouldn't have worried. I expect the Abbot rather enjoyed the episode, only he didn't want to show it to the monks in the refectory. Did he mention it to you afterwards?"

"Yes, but he said I shouldn't have removed it from my finger. He was just interested in it and wanted to know all about it. I told him it was a family heirloom although rather on the large size."



"FOOTBALL AT THE MONASTERY."

"It's dashed funny. But you never told me what they gave you to eat after the soup."

"A kind of ragout with lots of vegetables, and again, a few of these were quite new to me . . . things that were supposed to be very good for one, but needed a strong constitution. We had a pink blancmange sprayed over with a lemon-yellow sauce. This was a special Sunday treat. During the week, there was little pudding going—occasionally a few apple-stews without sugar . . . and nearly always the home-made cheese which was as tough as bricks. I brought a large one back for father. He tried a small portion and that was all. I think the cheese is still in his studio."

"Your father'll probably find some use for it, what? If he's still got the stuff and it's not gone too far you might bring it over; I'd rather like to see what the old monks do in the way of cheese."

"Then I'll try to get hold of it."

"You'd better wrap a lot of paper around it: otherwise you won't find a soul to sit next to you in the train."

"The monks must have a pretty good digestion as they eat a lot of it."

"It's all a question of getting used to things. You'd be surprised if you knew the things I've eaten in my life—particularly when I was abroad."

Lizzie collects the tea things and seems delighted that I've finished everything. Brangwyn looks at her and says:

"The monastic *régime* is a little too severe, Lizzie. Mr. Belleruche hasn't quite got used to it yet." Then he turns in my direction and asks if the Abbot was interested in the forthcoming exhibition. "Did he like my Stations of the Cross?" he inquires, twisting a pencil in his fingers.

"Yes. He liked the way you had interpreted the *Via Crucis* and said all the monks had made appreciative remarks. They felt



you had given something of the anguish of that terrible episode."

"I'm glad to hear that. I see the story of Our Lord as one of all time and for this reason made my figures as if they might be of any period."

"Some of the monks said the women were still wearing those heavy cloaks in Bruges to-day. They felt you must have been influenced by your early upbringing in their city. The Abbot told me your Stations of the Cross would hang all round their Chapter House, and hoped that one day they might be able to commission you to design stained glass windows so that the whole room would be your work—a BRANGWYN ROOM. He also said there was a deep religious feeling in your interpretation of the Way of the Cross. He felt you had done your greatest work and was most anxious to see the original drawings as soon as they came to Bruges."

"Well, if the monks feel like this about my work I'll make them a gift of several of my drawings after the exhibition. They can decorate the monastery with them, put them up in the cloisters and the chapels. I might be able to find them some large murals for the refectory also. Yes, yes, they shall have these things. I couldn't find a better home for them. We'll have a long talk about all this next time you come."

Brangwyn goes and answers the front door. He brings in an old sailor man and asks me to let him have my chair. "Our friend, Mr. de Belleroyche, has been staying with the Monks of Saint André in Bruges," he shouts out to his visitor who seems slightly deaf. Then, chasing me off, whispers in my ear. "This old chap wants to exchange a few old sea-yarns with me. We both know a good deal about the sea . . . what?"

A bad likeness of the Father Abbot.



"A BAD LIKENESS OF THE FATHER ABBOT."



VII

BRANGWYN'S CHANGING MOODS

A WEEK later, I find Brangwyn pacing up and down the room, very restless and red in the face. He sees me arrive and starts bellowing out from the fireplace, his fingers pointing fiercely in my direction.

"I think we'll have to abandon the idea of that exhibition in Bruges, Belleroyche! I can't find the stuff and am too old to do any fresh paintings. Yes—if I were ten years younger . . . I might have knocked up a sketch or two in oils worthy of the exhibition. But what can an old man do who's inflicted with illness . . . what? . . . WHAT? Do you realise that to paint a picture of importance takes it out of you too much. I'm not well enough, do you hear?" shaking his head. "To-day, I've no longer got the energy—and I'm fed up." He gives me one of his looks: "It's the truth—I'm telling you. If I send over the stuff in my studio . . . these Belgians will be saying our friend Brangwyn has deteriorated."

"How can you say such things? You didn't feel like this last week—don't you remember? You spoke about Bruges as the city of your birth and how you would like her to remember you. You mentioned the memory of your father and mother and your desire that the monks in the

refectory should have something to brighten them up. Please, Mr. Brangwyn . . .”

“I know ! I know ! but I’ve had time to think the matter over. I’ve gone into it thoroughly and have come to the conclusion that the stuff’s not good enough.” His voice becomes a little more subdued. “You’ve got to be damned careful before sending any pictures to Belgium—they’re an artistic lot and very critical.”

“But I don’t understand ? After all your successes on the Continent—— Why do you say these things ? I feel very discouraged that you should take this attitude. You’re not still thinking of the House of Lords—are you ?”

“What’s that got to do with it ?” he replies tartly. “No, I thought I could perhaps find sufficient pictures of importance, but after poking about the studio I find nothing but pot-boilers and studio-knock-ups. Perhaps a few decorative panels and one or two pictures that need a couple of hours’ work to make them right . . . but what are one or two pictures—— *Nothing*—man !”

“The things I saw were very fine.”

“*You* may think so.”

He shakes his head with determination. “No—it’s no use ! I think you’d better write to the monks and tell them Mr. Brangwyn prefers to do nothing until he’s had time to see what he can find.” He looks out of the window. “Then you can say when you see them that the whole idea is a wash-out !”

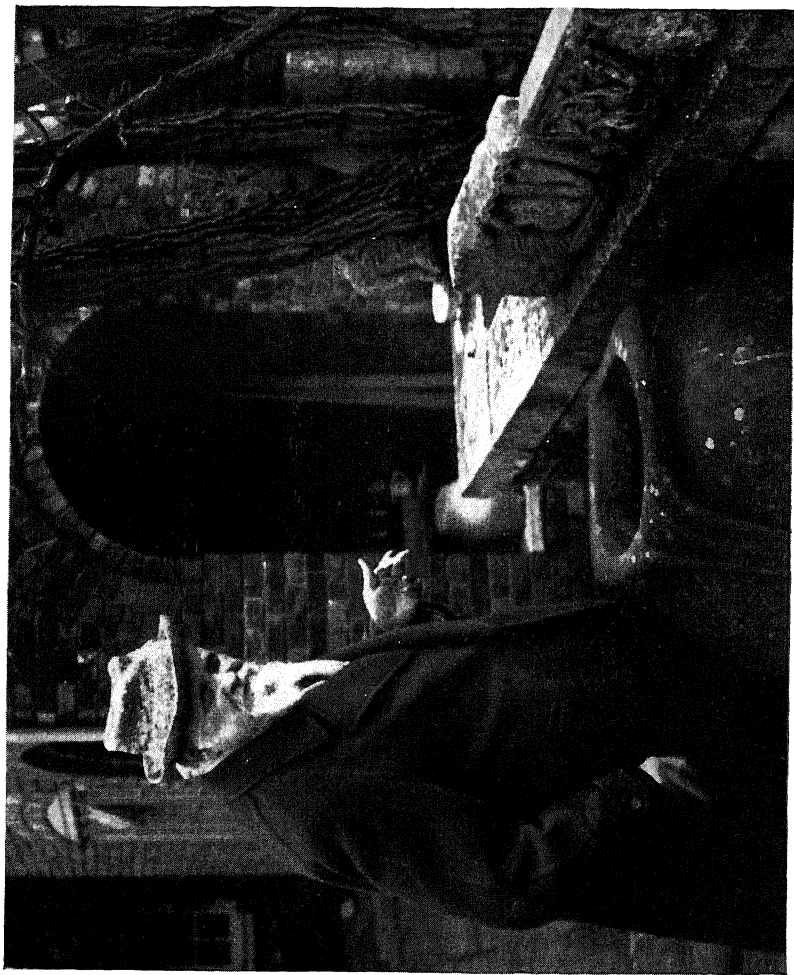
Reading my disappointed expression he tries to explain.

“But I haven’t got the stuff, Belleruche. It’s no use showing you’re upset ; that only makes things worse.”

“I *am* discouraged. I thought it was all settled.”

“But you must realise that if I felt I had the stuff I’d be the first man to ship it over to Bruges.”

I suggest we go for a stroll in the garden. Brangwyn thinks it’s a good idea and calls Roger to accompany us. Lizzie passes us in the corridor and says the sun is very warm. We walk across the lawn and make for an old wooden seat. The Master is the first to sit down. He plants himself gingerly



BRANGWYN TALKS ABOUT GARDEN ORNAMENTS.

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BRANGWYN'S CHANGING MOODS

in one corner and orders me to sit down quietly in the other as the seat is not very secure. "No, farther up that end . . ." he insists, "or you'll knock out the balance and there'll be an accident." The thing happens before I have time to sit down—a large crackling noise and the wooden plank points heavenwards. "Damn it!" he exclaims. "Now something's happened. I told you it would." Getting up from his awkward position he leads the way to the other seat, hitting his stick along the path every two strides.

We walk in single file followed by Roger—Brangwyn halting occasionally to pick up a weed from the path. "It's a question of making room for other things to grow," he sings out jovially. Looking at the weed he starts to talk about the beauty of nature. "Look at this, isn't the drawing in it beautiful? And yet you hear people who don't recognise a Creator of all these things——" He laughs contemptuously. "These people have only to look at nature, the shape and perfection of this tiny weed. Oh, I can spend hours among my plants and green stuff . . . one is never tired with the endless variety of plant life."

He continues his walk, and approaching the far wall hits his stick on a large white slab. "This is a bit of Florentine



bas relief. Look at the beauty and simplicity of its pattern. It's very early and must have been part of a great decoration. Anyone seeing it'd think it'd been in that wall for years, what? I had many of these pieces at one time."

My eyes wander along the wall and pick out little shrubs of all kinds growing in the cement. Brangwyn himself cannot explain this mystery. He points to an ornament placed at the end of a large stone. "You see that, Beller Roche!"

"But it's a scallop shell."

"And why not?" He touches it with his finger. "These things are beautiful to look at."

"It reminds me of the *Birth of Venus*."

He sits down on the wooden seat, feeling it gently with his hand. "Ah, now you're talking of one of the most beautiful pictures ever painted. The *Birth of Venus*. . . . Gosh, what a picture. This work, in my opinion, is *perfect* in every way. Each time I look at it my mind is set going in all sorts of directions, and that's how a fine picture should affect one!"

Brangwyn holds his stick firmly in both hands and hits it on the stone paving. "Come and sit down. Isn't the sun fine—mind you, I can't stick the heat too long, so let's get on with our talking before we have to shift over into the shade."

He points to another seat by his studio and notices a colourful assortment of washing hanging out. "Quite an interesting note for a picture, what? The old sundial on the right looks well. All it wants is a woman hanging a shirt on the line, with a little kid playing about on the lawn." Roger comes running into the picture. "Ah! he looks a treat, poor old fellow . . . isn't the sun wonderful? It brings life to all those little plants in the pots. One could look at them for weeks . . . months . . . years."

"I love the way the sun plays about on the colour of the flowers."

"Fine, what?"

He gets up from his seat. "Come along, Beller Roche, it's too darned hot! Let's move to over there——" He walks

a good westerly wind to Mrs. Peacock's joy.



“A GOOD WESTERLY WIND TO MRS. PEACOCK’S JOY.”

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across the lawn taking enormous strides and then stoops to have a little game with Roger.

Mrs. Peacock comes out holding a bucket which she lays by the sundial and puts more washing on the line. The light catches her figure and brings to life the picture the Master made about. Roger takes the place of the "kid."

"Gosh, what a picture!" he ejaculates. "Look at the folds of her white apron——" He pushes my arm. "And the pale blue of her dress reflecting into the white." He looks on for several moments and then joins me on the seat. "It's funny that we were talking of a figure to complete the picture and a few moments later the whole thing is served up for us on a plate. Life is full of little surprises, what?"

Still keeping his eyes on the scene, he proceeds: "Now, look at the little yellow on the ground . . . these few buttercups seem to have been put there purposely to give the necessary note. Oh, there's no getting away from the fact that nature is wonderful. What one admires about old Leonardo is that he *did* recognise this and kept his eyes open for these things, picking out all sorts of little bits, plants, rocks, etc., that the average passer-by wouldn't notice."

"There's an interesting description in Leonardo's notebooks on the human eye, Mr. Brangwyn."

"I know, old chap. All these sayings are very wonderful and have been thought out before by millions of fellows who expect to get credit for their 'inventions.' Nothing is invented—the ball keeps rolling. Someone writes a book and gets credit for the thought, but no doubt thousands have had the same thought and haven't put it down in writing. Leonardo would write backwards on an old walking stick. Now, whether this is genuine or a pose is difficult to tell, but there's too much explanation nowadays."

"And less progress."

"Progress? In many things we've been going backwards for years." He swings his walking stick from side to side. "You can't say we're producing things to-day superior to what's been produced in the past . . . can you?"

"I'm afraid we can't."

"There's no new vision, nothing. We're only doing badly something that's already been done, what? It is often the ill-doing of a thing that gives the semblance of originality."

"Several new visions. But we can do without them."

"Damn it! That's just where you're wrong. You can't even give the fellows credit for a new vision. They never express anything *really* new. Even a fine artist doesn't invent anything really new. He merely carries the stone a little further, gives *his* impression of a thing that exists, a thing which has always existed." Pausing a moment. "The artist is only the instrument of the Almighty. He never invents anything of his own . . . of course he doesn't. Oh, we're certainly living in a funny age, there's no getting away from it. That's the cursed trouble. Men were greater in the old days—even if you did get a tough lot of ruffians thrown in. I don't care what anyone says, these people *did* have character."

He pauses a moment to light his cigarette. "The other day I was reading again Merykowski's novel *The Fore-runner*—a book made up very largely from the writings of Leonardo. The author talks of him as a weird fellow, a curious sort of guy who'd grow peaches and spend his time poisoning the roots—that was old Leonardo." Shaking his head he begins to smile: "A queer old bird . . . a great man of many gifts, but a pity he wasted his time on such things."

"I don't know whether you can call poisoning a gift."

"No, I don't mean when he set out to poison a fellow . . . but his life and interests. These are the things I mean. For instance, one hears that if he met an interesting pedlar, he'd follow him the whole ruddy afternoon just to make studies of him. He's been known to fill a whole sketch-book on these occasions. Yes, he was a restless, queer spirit was old Leonardo."

"But you have done these things yourself. In fact, you have painted more curious characters than any other painter I know."

"Well, that's been my life. Find beauty in the man at work, the poor fellow on the road who's spent his last penny and

the beery old ruffian who sleeps under a haystack. Yes, I know 'em all! Fine fellows you get, especially among the working people. Now, take the peasant. He's about the only person who isn't sophisticated, but there are few peasants now. That's why I like a little kid before it's been spoilt—absolutely natural. We're all too bloody self-conscious—that's been the curse of life. Always worrying about what people think of us. The only time one is ONE-SELF is when a person puts one's back up and one speaks freely, what?"

He stoops to pick up a daisy which he sticks in his mouth. "Yes, but some of them are rum fellows." Taking the flower out of his mouth he begins to pull the petals away: "Now, old Leonardo wouldn't only admire nature, but he'd start dissecting it to see the ingenious mechanism of things. He'd count how many petals there were in a daisy and try to explain what laws of nature produced half the flower white and the other yellow. Damn it, that's where all the trouble lies to-day! . . . experimenting and wanting to prove things, instead of just accepting them, what?"

He spreads out the white hairs of his beard and brings them back to a point. "Why not take things as they are? We've never got anywhere by trying to prove why this flower is red and the other yellow," shaking his head. "We get so far . . . and no further."

"But don't you think it essential for a painter who studies anatomy to understand these things?"

"What things?"

"Well, the mechanism of the body."

"Of course it is. The harm only begins when he wants to try and *explain* the forces that made the most ingenious of God's creations . . . the human body. That's where the trouble and danger lie."

Throwing a leg up on the seat he rests his right arm on the side. A slight breeze sends his straw hat rolling across the lawn. Roger sees it and thinks it's a game. I rescue it just in time and Brangwyn presses it firmly down on his forehead.

"Silly hats these; if you don't hold them on your head they're a cursed nuisance."

"It reminds me of when I was at school. A person with a new straw hat had to let the senior fellows push their fist through it."

"Is that what one is sent to school for?" Taking a look at his hat: "This one's had a knock or two in its day, but that's through wear. Yes, anatomy was one of Leonardo's greatest claims." He resumes: "A famous surgeon once stated that he didn't know any more than Leonardo about anatomy. Now during his time it was difficult to get a body and dissect it. If you weren't careful you'd get into the hands of the inquisition and the Church would spring up against you. Yes, those days were very unhealthy. If you got a scratch it'd turn septic and death'd follow." He leans forward in my direction. "Now, Leonardo's writings are very illuminating. They show how he was interested in everything in life, how he made notes of people's expressions, movements, and of their reactions to things. An extraordinary man he was. . . . Yes, EXTRAORDINARY."

I tell Brangwyn I'd like to see the important book recently published on Leonardo's writings.

"Oh, it's dashed interesting," he exclaims. "Haven't you read it?"

"No, but I've got an edition of his writings published many years ago in French. It was given to me by Baron Jean van Caloen."

"I'd like to see it. Bring it over next time you come." Then he asks: "What do you think of the *Mona Lisa* . . . do you like it?"

"Not more so than his other paintings."

"Ah, I'm glad to hear that." Pausing a few seconds. "I expect the *Joconda* looked like that and had that expression. People think Leonardo made her look wonderful. Maybe; but I think she just looked like that."

I mention that one of the Italian authors, a contemporary of Leonardo, gives a living account of how the *Mona Lisa* was painted. "She sat for her portrait surrounded by



A FEW MOMENTS IN THE SUN.

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lovely things. Rare birds would sing to her as she was being painted. Delicious fruits were brought on gold and silver plates. Music was played by the finest musicians. All this so that she could have the *Mona Lisa* smile."

"Well, that's damned silly. Making a fuss over something that's quite natural. No, the *Mona Lisa* must have been a good portrait of the person. Otherwise the husband wouldn't have accepted it. The smile isn't Leonardo's doing so much as the work of the Almighty. The woman was like that."

Brangwyn thereupon hits his walking stick on the stone paving to sum up the discussion. "Yes, a weird man was Leonardo. His drawings are wonderful, often more interesting than his paintings. Take, for example, those little sketches he made, full of expression, the ones he used for illustrating his treatise on painting. And yet, I can't help feeling that he wasted a lot of his time trying to prove things which had little to do with his art . . . things we've noticed at times but have not worried about."

Rising from his seat he leads the way to the house. "Come on, Belleruche! One can have too much of a good thing and I've had too much of this damned heat, what?"

Roger comes running up and jumps round the Master who continues talking as he walks. "Leonardo was a complete man in a sense. He loved atmosphere . . . effect, distances, and could paint rocks like nobody else. Oh, he's a great figure in the history of art: One of the first to suggest aerial distances, etcetera."

As we come to the house, he says: "Mind the step, old chap. Go into the dining-room and make yourself comfortable."

He returns presently, whistling one of his little tunes and lays an old Oriental firearm on the table: "Rather a swagger affair this old pistol. I picked it up abroad on one of my travels. Take it for your collection, but when you clean it see that you don't cut your fingers on the sharp corners. You might get blood poisoning."

"It's a fine looking weapon."

"Yes, and it'll clean up A 1."

Then something takes place which I had been hoping for all the afternoon. Brangwyn has changed his whole attitude regarding the Bruges Exhibition. "I'm sorry I felt as I did about Bruges," he begins. "But, you see, Belleruche—I'm apt to get disheartened. Times have altered, and those who used to like my work are either dead or have fallen for other things which to my mind are nothing more than bloody abortions. But despite this, there's a lot of very fine stuff being turned out all over the world. You see what I'm getting at?"

"Yes, but *you* have no need to worry."

"The critics are funny nowadays."

"Surely, you're not afraid of them?"

"Damn it, of course I'm not afraid! In fact, I don't know why I'm talking about the critics. I have no use for the critics. They are of no help to the artist or the public. What right have they to pass judgment when many of them know nothing . . . NOTHING!" He raises his head with a sigh and says softly: "But the trouble is, some people listen to the critics, a vast majority of them I'm afraid, and that's where the trouble lies. The critics have the power to influence the so-called art world."

"But not the man in the street."

"Ah, well, *he* fights shy of any art demonstration. He just says he hasn't got time for art."

"But he has certainly his own feelings."

"Yes! feelings of bewilderment and contempt or indignation. At heart he probably thinks the critic and the artist merely damn fools; so art has no message for him."

"It seems very wrong."

"There are a lot of things that seem wrong in this world, but we've got to put up with them."

Brangwyn lights a cigarette and takes a long pull. Then he comes back to the subject of the Bruges Exhibition. "What I was telling you about not being able to get up the steam as I used to is absolutely true. You must realise that to work on one of these large compositions takes it all out of you. I'm dead tired by the end of the day and that's why I like to be quiet and read."

He goes down the passage and says he'll be back in a few moments. Then, I hear a voice calling out: "Hoy! Hoy! . . . Belleruche! I'd like to show you a few early sketches of mine in the studio."

I go along, and find him a totally different person, his face full of enthusiasm and determination. "What about having this picture for the Bruges Exhibition?" he exclaims, wiping off layers of dust with his sleeve. "Any good?" I can't quite understand this *volte-face* and remain speechless. "Well, say something, Belleruche—say, if you don't like it!"

"Very fine, Mr. Brangwyn."

He points to several others. "And how about those?" Then picking some of them up. "That's an old house in Bruges, and how about these trees painted by moonlight?"

"What a heavenly blue."

"Glad you like it. My heart has always rested in these low-tone pictures." Taking a pull from his cigarette he sends the smoke in my direction: "There's something restful about them, what?" Then wetting his handkerchief and rubbing the blue sky: "This picture would come up all right if it was cleaned. But the majority of these works are just sketches, and it's in this light that the people of Bruges would have to look at them."

"They have great beauty."

"I should have done many more of these, and I always say that if I'd stayed in Bruges instead of knocking around the world I should have been a far better artist. What could have been finer than to paint in that Sacred City, Bruges, and have my father and mother with me?"

"Why did you cease doing low-tone pictures?"

"I'll tell you. I once called on a friend of mine who'd bought some of my pictures. When I went to his house I saw one of my low-tone pictures hanging in his dining-room looking like a black spot on the wall. From that moment I said to myself . . . 'This won't do—Art must brighten up a room' . . . and that's what I set out to do. Later on I went to the East and was struck by the rich and magnificent colouring of things." He looks at his early paintings. "But

"I've always liked this sort of thing . . . always." He seems hesitant for a few moments and then asks: "Do you think some of these could go to Bruges? I've got quite a lot of these early works, enough to fill several big rooms. Perhaps I could also paint a few pictures for the exhibition, paint them purposely, I mean. Some artists have been known to do their best works in their old age. It's wrong to say one can't do a thing until one's had a shot at it, what?"

We walk into the dining-room and sit down by the table. "When you write to the monks, ask them how they feel about everything. I was thinking the other night after you'd left that if there were certain difficulties in the monastery for exhibiting the work to the public it might be necessary to talk to Lambotte and see whether we couldn't show some of the stuff in Bruges. By the way, you never told me whether you saw him when you were in Belgium. I gave you a letter for him, didn't I?"

"Yes, but I didn't think it was necessary to go the first journey. I thought I'd see him next time."

Brangwyn gives me a searching look as I tell him I have a project in mind.

"What project?" he demands.

"I was thinking perhaps there might be an opportunity of founding a permanent museum of your works in Bruges during your lifetime."

"No! No! . . . No! you spend your time living in dreams, Belleroche! The only chance of a museum in Bruges is when I've kicked the bucket. Then they might think of collecting a few of F.B.'s drawings and sticking them in one of their museums. But a Brangwyn Museum, well, that's impossible . . . madness on your part to think about it." He pauses to light another cigarette: "Besides, how would you get hold of the stuff?"

"That's precisely the question I wanted to discuss with you. There's no reason why we shouldn't go into it now. Some time ago you said you had a lot of drawings you wanted to find a home for. Don't you remember—it was about a month ago."

"Yes, I *do* seem to have said something about it, but a lot of these works have since been given away to museums."

"Well, if I could persuade Lambotte to get the city of Bruges to devote a building for some of your works, would you be willing to present them?"

"But, my dear sir, I'd present them with anything I could lay my hands on that I thought good enough. . . . Anything, so that I could be remembered in the city of my birth. I'd even buy back some of my works from collectors, and ask for pictures that I've lent to some of our provincial museums. I'd get together as good a collection as possible." He can't believe that anything like this could happen. "What reasons have you to think the Belgians would do this for me?"

"I said it was only a project, Mr. Brangwyn."

"But you haven't even spoken to Lambotte about it."

"No, but I'll do so when I go to Bruges in about a fortnight's time. I just wanted to have a word with you first of all."

"Well, you know how I feel about it. But, take care not to force the pace and ruin all hopes of an exhibition at the monastery. I don't want to push my works on people."

"I'll treat the whole matter with as much tact as possible."

"Good, that's the way to do it."

Brangwyn then takes me to the studio he has upstairs and shows me some other works. He picks up a portrait of his old model Franklin and sticks it inside a beautiful Florentine carved frame. The picture is too large, so he moves it up and down and calls out:

"Say when, Belleruche?"

"A little more of the head, Mr. Brangwyn."

"How much——?" He moves the picture lower down. "Is that all right. . . . I'd like to show some of the blue sky?"

"Yes, that's better. It looks like a Fra Filippo Lippi."

"Ah, now you're talking of a man who could paint a picture. Come over here and hold the sketch so I can stick a few tacks behind."

I hold the work and notice a pile of lovely water-colours. "Are any of these going, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Well, I thought of giving *some* of them." He points with his finger. "That one, and that one . . . and——" then pausing. "No, the others aren't good enough."

"But that one of the river scene is superb."

"That's the *River Lot*."

"And that other one?"

"*Hammersmith*."

"Surely, you'll send these to Bruges?"

He shrugs his shoulders. "All right then. Shove them over there with the others. Funny, you should like that Hammersmith one?" He brings out a small picture from behind the door and exclaims: "How about this for a nude study?"

"Yes, YES!"

"Well stick it in! I'm afraid you're apt to be too enthusiastic. You like everything I've done. Don't forget these Belgians are very critical . . . damned critical they are! I've got to watch my step, otherwise when they collect together in the little Bruges cafés . . . some of them will be saying: 'A poor collection of Brangwyns,' and down goes my reputation."

Returning to the dining-room, he tells me to write to the Abbot and say he is looking out the works. "Don't forget to give him my kindest regards."

Then seeing me off he leans over the little iron gate. A rustic tramp comes up the road. He passes the house, his back loaded with sacks and is stopped by a loud: "Hey . . . Governor!" from Brangwyn, followed by: "What have you got in there?" pointing to the old sacks and boots hanging over the tramp's back. Naturally he takes this remark as an invitation and starts displaying all his belongings on the pavement outside the house.

Brangwyn is highly amused, and seeing a few chalk drawings in the collection, observes: "So you're an artist?" He picks one up of a Saxon church. "That's a good'un . . ."

The tramp is not in the least impressed and replies: "I'm known all over the country for my landscapes. Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Ramsay Macdonald have patronised my work."



"THE ARTIST TRAMP CALLS AT RUSTINGTON."

They know a real artist when they see one. Real nice gentlemen, sir."

Brangwyn tries to hold back a laugh. He picks up one of the tramp's sketches and says: "Well done! Have you any more of these?" The tramp, who has previously passed the house several times to waylay the Master (but without success) now finds that he is very approachable and begins to show several examples of his work. He tells him he called earlier on in the afternoon, but the lady who opened the door refused to let him in. "I was told, Mr. Brangwyn . . ." he begins, "that you were very poorly and couldn't see anyone. The lady also said I wasn't to come again so I was surprised when I saw you on the doorstep. I knew it was you, sir, because I had seen photographs of you with a beard . . ."

Brangwyn stifles his laughter, obviously finding the old tramp very entertaining. "Where are you putting up for the night?" he asks. "It's a little damp to sleep under a haystack. Now yesterday would have been a glorious day." The tramp shakes his head, for he hasn't thought about the night as yet. Brangwyn produces half a crown from his pocket and says: "Here, take this! and get yourself a bed at a pub for to-night."

The tramp is duly grateful and mutters something in his beard which sounds like: "May the Almighty bless you—and please accept this drawing." He proffers a pastel which Brangwyn declines in a kindly way.

"Half a minute. That's your best sketch. You can't give it away, old chap. You may need it as a show piece, what?"

The tramp insists: "*Please* accept it, sir?"

"No, no, NO!" the Master replies. But it is no use. The artist tramp begins to take offence so Brangwyn fishes out another piece of silver and says: "Very well, but you must take this!"

The tramp starts another of his muttering noises. This time it is much clearer: "May the Almighty bless you for your kindness and give you good health to continue your

work." Collecting his belongings he raises his hat and disappears up the road.

Brangwyn returns inside with the sketch. "What am I going to do with it, Belleruche?" he chuckles. "A cheery old ruffian, what? If ever he calls at your house you might take a photo of him. These fellows are getting extremely rare."

Then he turns round suddenly, and sees me walking into the house with him. "I say old chap, you'd better be getting along as well. It's late."

As I am half-way up the road I hear a voice calling after me. "Stick to that idea of yours, Belleruche. I'll do all I can to help you."



VIII

SIR PAUL LAMBOTTE AT HOME

DURING the next two weeks I receive many letters from the monastery. They all make me realise that although the monks are anxious to do all they can for us, it is difficult to organise an exhibition in the monastery and make it accessible to the general public. The *Beguinage* is suggested, but to have the exhibition there we should have to wait several months as the building is being used for another purpose. The only thing to do, therefore, is to pay a visit to Sir Paul Lambotte in Brussels. I leave unexpectedly and return a week later with good news.

As I arrive at the Jointure, Mrs. Peacock tells me that Brangwyn is in the garden. She wonders what I've been up to and has an intuition that I've been to Belgium.

I hurry into the garden calling: "Mr. Brangwyn, where are you?" No reply. I call again. "Mr. Brangwyn, Mr.—" then a distant voice answers:

"Hullooo . . . HULLO, who is it?"

"Where are you?"

"Down in the cabbage patch."

Roger appears and runs up to me. Brangwyn follows a

few moments later, wearing a large, cream-coloured panama concealing three-quarters of his face. "You . . . Belleruche?"

"Yes, Mr. Brangwyn, and good news!"

He looks pleased, but tries to control his feelings by diverting the subject, pointing to some fine orange-yellow nasturtiums creeping all round an old vase pleasantly tempered by the weather. "What about this for colour?" Then twirling his moustache. "Well, did you see Lambotte?" he asks, cutting a few dead leaves from the nasturtiums with a neat little pair of scissors he produces from his pocket.

"Can we sit down? There's a lot to tell you."

"Yes, yes, when I've finished this little job." He notices a crack running down the vase. "This'll have to be seen to, otherwise the whole thing'll collapse. I must get Chatfield the gardener to put a wire round it."

He then walks over to the seat, the broken one which has now been repaired, and sits down carefully. "Be careful, Belleruche! I've had this seat done up during your absence and I don't mind telling you it cost me a bob or two. . . . So just be careful."

As I begin to tell my story, I notice a whimsical expression on his face. "Lambotte asked me to give you this book on Flemish Painting with his kind regards. He has written inside . . . '*à Frank Brangwyn. Au grand Maître et au grand Cœur.*'"

"Well, that's decent of him, what?" He hurries through the pages and says: "I'll read this to-night after you've gone. You'd better write and thank him straight away. That'll give me time to look out an etching or two he might like to have."

"He's got some hung all over his house. They look most impressive."

"Yes, I've given him a few at odd times. He's always seemed to have a certain respect for my work."

"Respect——? He compares you to Rembrandt. So this made a nice opening for my project."

"Ah! and what did he say?"

"I spoke about what we were doing in Bruges and of

certain difficulties that had arisen at the monastery. Then I asked if it would be possible to hold the exhibition in Bruges and afterwards let the monks have the religious drawings for the monastery. He said he would do all he could to help us. He promised to see the Mayor of Bruges, *Senateur van Hoestenbergh*e, and to tell him that as you were born in their city it would be a great asset to have a Brangwyn Exhibition there. I then hinted at what was at the back of my mind. Lambotte was quick to pick up my thoughts and said: 'This would be wonderful. But how could Belgium afford to purchase a Brangwyn Collection when the funds available for acquiring works of art would never be sufficient for such a project.' He then spoke of a house he had in mind for holding the exhibition. This was the Hotel Arents. A fifteenth-century building situated a few hundred yards from Notre Dame with the canal across the road and a stone throw from the Musée Communal with all its priceless Van Eycks and Roger Van der Weydens. The house is part of the Gruthuuse Palace."

"I know the place and its beautiful little garden."

"Well, I told Lambotte it was all a question of approaching you in the right spirit. I then asked him to find out what would be the possibilities should you decide to make a gift. He was thrilled at the idea and went to see the Mayor of Bruges the following day. He rang me up on his return and said there was a good possibility of the town offering the Hotel Arents to make a museum of your works: A Brangwyn Museum. He also said he would write to me the moment the matter had been settled and felt he could exert a certain amount of influence in the project as the Hotel Arents housed a collection of Old Master engravings presented to the city by a relation of his wife. This collection he thought very properly might go to the *Bibliothèque*, leaving the Hotel Arents ready to receive the Brangwyn Collection. As I left him he added: 'Tell the Master I will do all I can to see that this project is realised.' Finally, he said I was to try to persuade you to make this gift to Bruges."

Brangwyn is frankly elated. "Grand news, what?"

"Yes, and as soon as we hear anything, we shall have to get the collection ready."

"Oh, that won't take long. But first let's see what happens."

Then he feels that the Rembrandt and other Old Master engravings should remain in a certain part of the building rather than go to the *Bibliothèque*. I now have to be as firm as I can with Brangwyn. I tell him it is essential that the town of Bruges should offer the *whole* of the Hotel Arents for his work and that the name should be converted into the Brangwyn Museum. Otherwise, the pictures may be moved and replaced by others. But he goes on repeating: "It's wonderful, I know! But what about the beautiful old engravings . . . Rembrandts among them? It seems a shame to disturb them for my works, what?"

"There are Rembrandt etchings in so many museums, Mr. Brangwyn. These will be seen equally as well at the *Bibliothèque*. To study them you need a table, a magnifying glass—but your etchings, drawings and oil paintings will form a complete unity."

"All right then. If this is the case, the Hotel Arents will have to be arranged as if it were my own home. Not a museum, but a private house where F.B. has lived. It must have some old pots on the tables, tapestries on the walls, a cat or two sitting by the fireplaces . . . not too many, as cats in bulk don't look well and are a nuisance. A few comfortable, solid oak seats should be distributed in the rooms so that the old Bruges folk could come and sit down, smoke their pipes, read the paper, or look at my pictures." Raising his voice and speaking slowly: "They must make the whole place intimate . . . cheerful, and at the same time keep a restful simplicity about it, what?" Then he thinks of other things. "I might design the furniture for the place, chairs, tables, and all kinds of useful things. I'd make the drawings, and some old carpenter in Bruges could carry them out. I'd pay the costs. Also I'd give them a few carpets made from my own designs."

"But why pay the costs? Surely, you're doing enough in offering the works."



"A ROUGH SUGGESTION FROM YOUR PHOTOGRAPH OF THE JOLLY OLD HOUSE, HOW I SHOULD LOVE TO SIT IN THE GARDEN WITH YOU."

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"Yes, but they wouldn't be much and it'd no doubt please the Mayor if I shared in the expenses."

"You're too generous. I think you would be depreciating yourself in the eyes of the Bruges people."

He thinks the matter over. "Well, all right then. But you now see what I'd like the place to look like—a house belonging to F.B. just before he had cleared out for a little holiday." He then wonders whether we're not living in dreams, and bursts out: "Let's shut up talking until we know definitely that they're going to give us the house! It's far better to expect nothing, NOTHING! until the thing comes off. Then there'll be hundreds of things to do, what?"

"I told Lambotte I'd go and live in Bruges and help with everything. He was pleased and said he would come over from Brussels to supervise the work. He warned me that there might be certain touchy old Bruges residents who might be jealous, and said I was to approach them cautiously. Apart from this, he felt I would thoroughly enjoy my stay in Bruges. He said it was an excellent idea to show some of the religious drawings at the monastery. Then the people would be able to go over to Saint André after the opening of the exhibition."

"A good idea. The Abbot will no doubt entertain everyone frugally and make a unique occasion of it."

"I'm sure he will."

"But see that no mention is made of the 'museum business' until the day of the opening ceremony. Then, when the Mayor has read his speech—you read a telegram which I'll send you a couple of days before (to make sure you get it) saying that F.B. presents the entire collection of 400 works to Bruges. We'll find some appropriate words at the time, something that'll express the feelings of joy of someone who sees his work recognised by the people of his native city. Then our friend Lambotte will say: 'Ladies and gentlemen'—no, one mustn't forget there may be cardinals and even royalty. However, he'll know how to address the gathering in the appropriate flowery manner and say: 'I have pleasure in declaring the Brangwyn Museum

open'." Smiling, he continues: "I shouldn't be so optimistic, but one can't help thinking what we should do if the real thing was to happen. The important thing is that this 'gift business' (if ever there is one and I sincerely hope there will be) must be kept a secret till the last moment otherwise the whole affair may be cooked up."

"I won't say a word about it."

"It's better not. People who'd get to hear anything might talk . . . TALK to the wrong lot."

"I shan't say a word."

"We're sometimes apt to talk too much, Belleruche. Better be careful if you don't want your work upset."

"You can rely on me, Mr. Brangwyn. I'm far too keen that the project should be realised. After what has happened to you with the House of Lords Murals I feel this would in a way repair some of the injustice that has been done to your work. On the Continent, they cannot believe it. I'm afraid it has done us a lot of harm. People have told me we never know how to appreciate our artists until they're dead. I won't mention any name, but I met an artist in Antwerp who'd heard of the rejection of your Panels. He said: 'Well, Brangwyn can design something *for us* and we'll know how to appreciate it.'"

"Who was it?"

"I'd rather not say. But I felt tempted to speak to him about the Bruges affair. I bit my tongue and said nothing! Then, I saw a reproduction of one of your water-colours in his dining-room. He treasured this as if it were an original. As I was about to go he told me that all friends of yours were friends of his and made me share his *petit souper*. The entire evening was devoted to you and your work."

"What a decent old chap he is! I must give you an etching to take to him next time you go over to Belgium."

"He'll be thrilled. When he spoke about your Murals he said he had never seen anything more decorative and rich in composition. He was longing to see the originals as he only knew the work through some reproductions in an art magazine."

"Well, I might give him a copy of the book that reproduced the lot in colours."

Brangwyn takes his walking stick in two hands and digs it into a crack between the stone paving, twiddles it round and skilfully removes a tiny weed. He looks up with joy, but his face has a smile that is hiding something which comes out in his conversation.

"Don't let's talk about these House of Lords Murals any more . . ." he breaks out, "I've done the work and enjoyed doing it. . . . I *loved* doing the work and for me that was all that mattered." Pausing a moment: "I just wanted to have my Panels hung in a hall where they could be seen at advantage." Then, almost whispering through his beard: "Swansea has got them and I'm delighted. Although, mind you, I always have in mind the building when I do decorative work, and I *sort of made* the Panels for the place . . . but don't let's look back on this."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Brangwyn. What has happened to all the drawings you made for the Murals?"

"Ah, some of them are rather good. A lot of negresses holding their babies and hundreds of studies of animals—my old parrot among them! They're on exhibition in Swansea."

"Could we have them for Bruges?"

"Well, I'd rather like them to stay with the Panels. However, I'll write and find out how the Swansea people feel about it."

"And how about your painting *The Afflicted*? You know the one I mean showing a procession of blind people, with a dog like Roger in the foreground."

"Yes, that's one of my good pictures." He thinks for a moment. "I've lent it to a provincial museum, but I might be able to get it back. I should very much like it to go there. It would appeal to the old Bruges folk, what?"

"And that lovely *Slave Market* showing a lot of women and monkeys painted in pastel colours of pinks, oranges, vermilions and greens."

"Yes, that's a work that would appeal to the Flemish. I must try to get hold of that. Unfortunately, it's no longer

mine, but I'll make a swop for it—or, if necessary, try to buy it back. Yes, yes, I'll do that to-morrow." He digs his fist into his cheek: "How do you remember the work, Belleruche?"

"I saw a coloured reproduction in the catalogue of your exhibition in Queen's Gate, the one opened by Ramsay Macdonald."

"Ah——"

"And could they have some of those tempera pictures I saw in the studio the other day—studies for the *Stations of the Cross*?"

"Yes, they might have those—and also many of the red chalk drawings. I've never wanted to sell these religious works." Then he sees another side to the picture. "But supposing they don't make the Brangwyn Museum?"

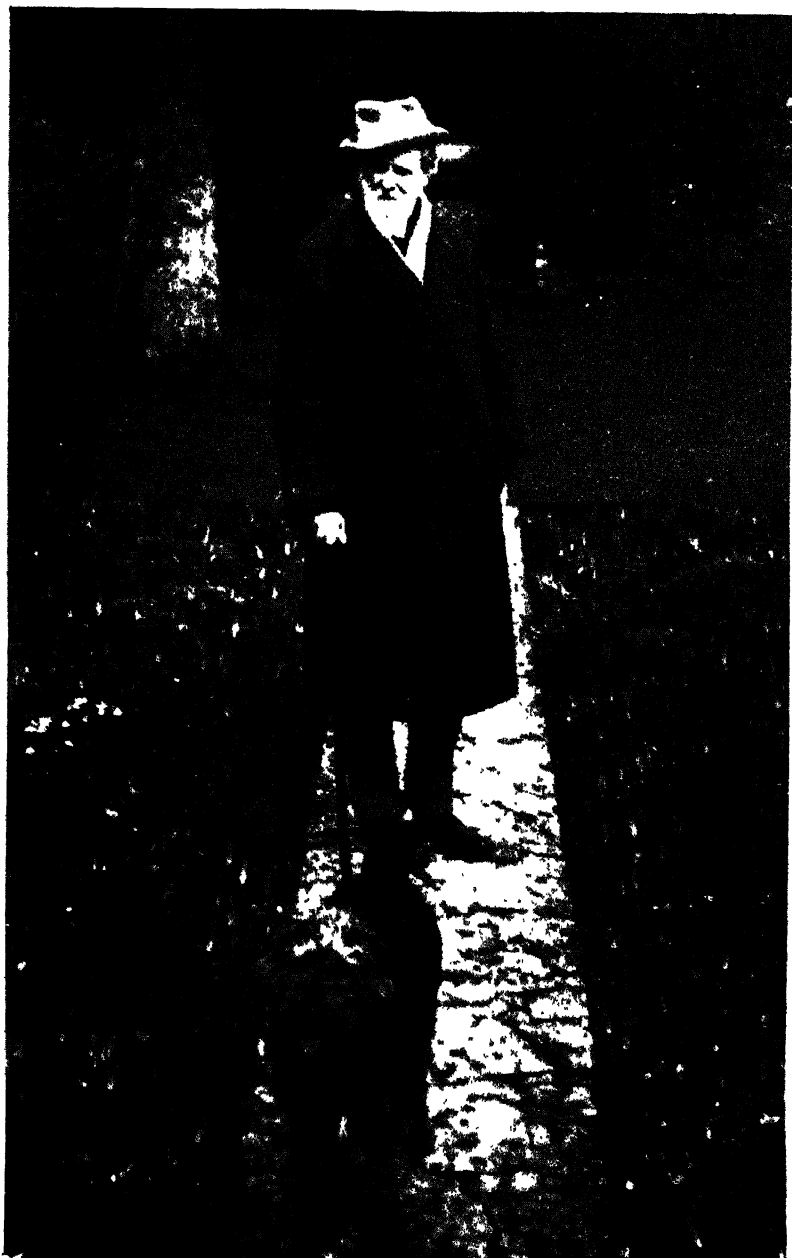
"Then we shall have the Brangwyn Exhibition. But I have a feeling that the town of Bruges will accept. They are very keen on the idea."

Rising up from the wooden seat, he turns towards the house. "Come inside, it's getting a bit hot," he calls out.

Mrs. Peacock brings me a cup of tea and tells me her flowers are finer than last year. She shows me a heavenly blue hydrangea and tells me the Master is going to paint it, but he keeps on putting it off and she fears the flower will fade before he gets out his paints. However, she feels that they give him joy, and this is her chief concern.

Brangwyn slips out of the room to fetch a copy of the *Little Flowers of Saint Francis*. He returns with the book a few moments later, and tells me he's going to do a spot of reading while I have my tea. Just as I finish the last slice of bread and butter thickly spread with home-made strawberry jam I notice a delightful little drawing in pencil of a woman's hand.

Seeing my eyes wander in the direction of the drawing he goes and picks it from the shelf at the bottom of a large mirror which decorates part of his dining-room. "This drawing is by Ingres," he tells me. "It was given to me by the French writer, Henry Lapauze, who was the curator



A STROLL IN THE GARDEN

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of the Ingres Museum at Montauban and who wrote the book on his work." He hands it over so that I can look at it. "It's a study for part of the famous portrait of Madame Montessier." *

I read the following inscription on the back of the frame : *Etude de Ingres, pour le portrait de Madame Montessier, offert au grand artiste BRANGWYN, en souvenir de ses visites au Musée Ingres de Montauban, et de ma visite à son atelier. HENRY LAPAUZE. Fev. 1921.*

Brangwyn seems somewhat embarrassed. "Yes, it was given to me as a mark of appreciation for my work." Then he bursts out suddenly : "They should make the Hotel Arents in Bruges like the Ingres Museum at Montauban, full of notes, sketches and studies. I know I shouldn't be comparing myself to Ingres, but it's about the museum and the way it's been got up I'm talking. The Hotel Arents should be a place full of my sketches and studies reflecting the different periods of my life." He puts the drawing back on the shelf upside down.

"Mr. Brangwyn——" I call out.

"What is it?" he exclaims, turning round with surprise.

"It's the Ingres drawing! You've put it upside down!"

"Oh, so I have!" Then looking at it afresh : "But you know, it looks quite good this way up—I might leave it like that for a bit, what?" shaking his head. "I often do this with my own works. Sometimes, you get a thing looking a damned sight more interesting when you've turned it upside down. A good thing is always a good thing, no matter what way you look at it."

Then he turns the conversation round to the Journals of Delacroix and talks about the reference to Ingres in some of his writings. "It's a funny thing that Ingres never liked Delacroix," he says—adjusting his black silk bow which is getting in the way of his beard. "Of course, Ingres was a terrible *poseur*. They say he used to go to a first night at the opera and stand up before the audience so that people could look at him. This dislike he had for

* This portrait is now at the National Gallery.

Delacroix may have been due to the fact that he was a clever draughtsman (Ingres, I mean); he would have thought that old Delacroix had a gift for slogging it on and that his works were slipshod. Yet Delacroix was a man who must have had a nice nature if one can judge by the portraits that were painted of him at the time."

Brangwyn goes and places the little Ingres drawing the right way up and says he feels happier now that it's on view the way it was drawn. "I think it's as well to leave things that are good the right way up. It's only when a thing isn't good that perhaps one might get something a bit better by playing about with it, what?"

He sits down by the table and thinks of Delacroix.

"To-day, people don't seem to admire men who've got imagination. Probably because they've got none themselves . . ."

"But, wasn't Delacroix himself largely to blame, remembering the strong influence he had on the Realists, and later, the Impressionists . . . which must have made these artists seek a more direct contact with life?"

"That may be so. Yes, but what's fine about Delacroix is that he gives you both realism and imagination. His work is so rich and complete."

He tips the ash of his cigarette into a pewter ash-tray and burns his finger. "Dash it, that's to tell me I'm smoking too much." Then, looking up with a smile: "Ingres must have been a narrow-minded person. Although, mind you, he may have admired Delacroix in secret; he *must* have admired certain of his qualities, even if he didn't think like him about certain things. It was all so different to his own conception of art."

"But shouldn't every true artist be broad-minded and charitable to others, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"You'd think so. But it's very difficult to make any hard and fast rules about this. Anyway, the way I look at it is that there is mostly something good in all work that is honest."

"And yet, don't you feel there are certain artists who have cut themselves entirely away from everything so that they can

live alone with their work and ideals? People who've struggled and only attained recognition after a life full of discouragements."

"Yes. But I don't think this was the case with Ingres." Pausing a moment. "Oh, it's a sad thing to meet an artist who bears a grudge against humanity. Yet the extraordinary thing is, his art will not necessarily suffer through this. But it's a weakness, a big weakness—— do you hear me? It *must be* overcome. One must learn to fight against it."

Brangwyn leans forward and rests his elbow on the table. "Now Delacroix and Ingres are like Tintoretto and Titian. I prefer the former, but many people prefer the latter. Yes, many of them look down on Tintoretto. Now, Delacroix was like Tintoretto . . . 'the flame' and Ingres, like Titian . . . the 'orderly statement finely done.' Another example of a creative artist is Blake. The difference between a fellow like Blake, and, shall we say . . . Gustave Doré, is that Doré painted facts and is therefore the more understood by the public."

He clears his throat with a sip of water from a tumbler on the table. "Gustave Doré would paint Adam and Eve in paradise with palm trees. . . . Blake would have a vision . . . Doré had *no vision* but imagination and interpreted things he saw around him. So you see, there's a great difference between the two men."

"Did Blake retain his vision all his life?"

"Yes. Something that enabled him to dwell in a world of his own . . . that is what we're given to understand by his work at any rate. It was something personal and creative. But the man had difficulty in expressing himself. This vision, which formed his life, was stifled by his insufficient capabilities of interpreting it in his work. Do you understand what I mean? There's a great difference between the two artists. Doré would have made a first-rate stage manager. . . . A builder of ballet. . . . Gosh! the fellow could have been the greatest theatrical designer the world's ever seen, what?"

"Father knew him well. He has some amusing little caricatures by him."

"I'd like to see them. I'm told he was hot stuff at that sort of thing. Next time you come over, pop them into your case. I remember seeing his illustrations to Balzac . . . his *Don Quixote* is fine, also the grotesque *Croquemitaine* full of humour and invention. Oh, yes, old Doré was a remarkable man."

"I'll try to bring the caricatures over."

"You speak as if it were difficult?"

"Father hardly ever permits anyone inside the studio."

Brangwyn laughs and says I should approach him in the right way. "I must say many artists feel like that about their studios. We're funny birds. We demand a certain amount of privacy and don't like people poking in their noses and knocking the stuff all over the shop."

He fidgets with a pencil and then looks up with an amused expression: "I could have had many Blake sketches when I was young; but I never cared for them then. I knew the son of one of his best friends." Then letting the pencil roll on the table: "I'll tell you what I do like—that's Blake's poetry."

"So do I."

"And those curious little illustrations he used to make to accompany the poems. They were very weird at times. His *Book of Job* is the best thing he ever did . . . it's a marvellous work! Of course old Blake was a bit off his head as we understand it. But most of us are in some way or other, what? He said he saw angels in the trees."

Brangwyn leaves the room to fetch some sketches he promised me. First ideas for pictures which he throws on to odd pieces of paper, book-jackets, used envelopes, bills, tax papers, Japan papers, tissue papers of every description, and private view cards with heavily embossed gilt coats of arms.

These little sketches, so often superb by their magic sense of bigness in a small space are chiefly done during the evenings when the Master sits in a chair after a day's work, letting his imagination play about and prepare work for the next day, sometimes for the next month, and sometimes for

years to come. In one particular case his preliminary sketches extended over seven years.

"This——" he tells me as he enters the room holding a packet of sketches and pointing out one particular drawing on a somewhat torn piece of paper, "is an idea I jotted on paper when I started my House of Lords Murals."

I look at this historic sketch. It has a few pencil figures with splashes of pinks, yellows, oranges, vermilions, and Mediterranean blues, on both sides of the paper. The side that captures my fancy is of a woman holding a large basket containing bunches of fruit, bananas, apples, and all kinds of delicious things.

"This was *not* my first idea for the Murals. The first idea being the glory and destruction of war—the aggressive side, the wasteful evil side. I made many sketches, in fact some full-sized cartoons. They were to carry on the Maclise idea as shown in the Death of Nelson, etc. . . . a fine work but no decoration. Then, after thinking it over, it seemed that the glory of peace should be the motive. So after talking it over with Lord Iveagh and his secretary, Mr. Bland, we decided that the whole scheme should be the glory of what the Empire gave us in its fruit and its people; a panorama of the fruits of the earth and its people, and what the men of the Empire gave their lives for. I finally decided to undertake the job on these lines. This was going to be the most important effort of my life's work." He buries the House of Lords sketch in the middle of the bundle and packs them all up. "You can go through the lot when you get home. But don't look at them now. They're not up to much."

"Well, I'm afraid I don't agree with you."

I pick up a pen and ink sketch from the table which for some reason has slipped out or was never put in the bundle. "And how about this one—it's small and yet very big?"

"Yes, that's true. When you come to look at Rembrandt's etchings, some of them are very small and yet they're ENORMOUS. But I'm now talking of one of the greatest artists of all time . . . REMBRANDT—he's a GIANT!"

"And what about your etchings, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Well, they could never be compared to the great Rembrandt."

"Many people have done so. People who have written about your work . . . Verhaeren the poet, Lambotte, Mauclair and many others."

"Well, they may think so—it's nice of them, but foolish." Then modestly changing the subject he points to the little pen and ink sketch. "That was my first idea for the etching I made of *Christ healing the Blind*."

"Oh, yes! You have the completed drawing hanging in the little room on the right as you come in."

"Yes, yes. . . Yes! That can go to the Bruges Exhibition. I'm glad you reminded me."

I now bring the subject back to the exhibition and ask: "When do you think you'll have the collection ready?"

Brangwyn thinks for a moment. He would like to know what is decided about the Hotel Arents and hesitates before answering. He tucks himself comfortably into his chair and sticks his hands in his sleeves. "I hope to have the whole lot ready in three or four weeks. If I do any fresh paintings, I can send them later. The great thing is to give Lambotte a rough idea of what's coming. We don't want to send a whole lot of stuff that they haven't got room for and which would have to come back. All this sort of thing adds to expenses and unnecessary worries. I could do a lot more, only I'm always afraid of showing works that are too sketchy. But I was forgetting that the Belgians take a fancy to this sort of thing. They rather like what is commonly known in France as *Le Morceau*."

"Yes, they do, Mr. Brangwyn. Did this term come from the Impressionist Movement?"

"I suppose so. But *Le Morceau* must be a good thing. Take, for instance, a sketch by Steinlen or Forain of just a few lines. Well, what is there—is usually dashed good and full of life and vitality."

"Father thinks a lot of these men."

“Well, so do I. They are very fine artists. One of them was a great friend of mine.”

Brangwyn begins to show signs of fatigue. He sinks back in his chair, stretches out his legs, and half-closes his eyes. “How about the time——” he asks in a soft voice. “It must be getting late, what?”

I go and ask Mrs. Peacock about my bus. She tells me I shall have to walk. I say good-bye and slip out quietly. A voice calls out as I open the front door: “Let me know as soon as you hear from Lambotte. . . .”



IX

A WAITING NEWS FROM BELGIUM

I AM awaiting news from Brussels before calling on Brangwyn. But, as nothing has arrived for the last ten days I decide to go over and see him and make sure he is keeping up his interest in the Bruges Exhibition.

I find him in the studio doing several jobs at the same time—mixing emerald green tempera on a piece of plate-glass and directing his assistant who is perched at the top of a ladder enlarging one of his decorative drawings to be converted into a mural. He picks up a brush and knocks in a head on the lower part of the canvas, bringing some of his emerald green colour to mark round the contours. His face lights up on seeing the richness of the colour. I remain perfectly still so as not to disturb him. But unfortunately I have little opportunity of seeing much of the man at work, as Brangwyn turns round suddenly and sees me standing in front of a large majolica vase, one of the finest I've ever seen.

"How did *you* get in, Belleruche——" he calls out, holding his left hand on his hip and accentuating the nose of a "brangwynesque figure" rather like an Apostle.

"Mrs. Peacock told me to come in," I falter, and then remain silent as he continues to form the nose and upper lip of the head. He throws a rapid glance at his assistant still perched at the top of the ladder, and then comes away from the canvas to wipe his hands on an old rag covered in lovely colours.

"Look at this!" he says. "Some of the Moderns would stick a kipper in the centre and call it *Venus having her Bath*" holding the rag up. "You know . . . there are one or two saucy bits of colouring in this old rag, what?" He hangs it on a nail next to a Gothic carving of an angel—glances at the arrangement for a moment and leads me by the arm to the dining-room. "I'll tell you a funny story that happened to me the other day. By the way, any news of Lambotte?"

"Not yet. But it all takes time. Don't forget, he has to see the Mayor and officials of Bruges."

"Perhaps he's written and the letter is on the way."

"It's possible. But don't worry."

"Oh, I'm not worrying. It's just that I want to know how we stand in the matter."

I divert the subject by asking whether he has any fresh Old Masters. His whole expression changes as he settles himself to tell his story.

"Take a seat, old chap, and listen to what happened to me the other afternoon." He sits by the window and looks out on the garden as he begins: "A fellow came to see me with a picture that'd been dug-up not very far from here. A damned silly picture; a thing that should never have been painted." He gets excited as he talks. "Now, this was done in a childish manner. Over the canvas was scattered an extraordinary arrangement of heads, fish, and sea shells which formed a weird composition—or rather a jumble of things. I'd never seen anything like it in all my life, what?"

He fetches a pencil and begins to make a sketch. "Now suppose you shove yourself out of the light—I'm trying to make a rough drawing of what the picture looked like." Then, pointing to the piece of paper, he says with a mischievous smile: "All this was hair . . . and these curious figures well, I'm damned if I know what they're supposed to represent . . . mermaids, perhaps, or prehistoric women. . . ."

As I pick up the sketch, he snatches it back and continues to draw. "Oh, you should have seen the detail. The fellow must have taken years to do it."

"Your sketch looks like a poor Cezanne that's crossed the channel, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Too carefully done for old Cezanne. He wasn't the man for detail. He'd never have taken such trouble."

"It's most amusing. Where did you say they found it?"

"Oh, I forget now. They had something about it in the Press and want to know what I think about it." As he chuckles his cheeks become highly coloured. "Well, didn't you read about it, Belleruche?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"You must have done! It said the picture was painted by an old fisherman, who, through the psychic influence of one of the Old Masters, gave this great expression to the world. . . ."

"There's a lot of stupid talk about psychic paintings, but it's all very materialistic. They never seem to get any further than something utterly ridiculous."

"That's what they all seem to be . . . RIDICULOUS! All I can say is if this laboriously painted picture was done under psychic influence, the fellow must have been in a trance for over a year. . . ."

"And the picture will probably end up in a leading art gallery. Something to give the critics an opportunity to write about."

"That's exactly what will happen. Now, twenty years ago, if you'd brought me this painting, I should have kicked you and the picture out of my house." He passes his hand over his beard and brings it down into a point. "But to-day one must be more indulgent. Why? Because one is never sure. The dealers have been fattening up the land with all the bad art of the world, and the Press seems to think it great stuff. Artistically, this painting has no interest whatever. Only the stamp of a fellow who couldn't draw, couldn't paint, and knew nothing—NOTHING!" He then bursts into ironic laughter. "Everything is sensation nowadays."

The 'phone is heard ringing and interrupts the conversation. Brangwyn calls out at the top of his voice: "Lizzie, where are you? . . . Go and see if she's in the kitchen. . . ." She arrives. "Oh, there you are! Answer the 'phone,

please, and if anyone wants me, tell them I'm unwell." He quietyens down just as Mrs. Peacock returns to the room bringing a message. "It's the *Daily Wind Blast** who want a story on the psychic masterpiece."

"What masterpiece——" he calls out, pulling his hair from across his forehead and becoming more and more irritated. "What MASTERPIECE?" he repeats. "Oh, they mean the curious affair that was brought over the other afternoon. Well, what do they want to know anyway?"

"An opinion," she says softly. "They're publishing a story about it."

"What—— what's that?" he cries out. "An opinion? What about? Tell them it has a certain interest only as the effort of someone trying to express something in his mind but who is incompetent and unable to get it out."

Mrs. Peacock returns to the 'phone and says: "The Master thinks the painting is interesting as . . ." She is stopped by Brangwyn who doesn't give her time to finish and who shouts out:

"Damn it, it's not interesting! I'd better go and speak to them." He picks up the receiver: "Hullo, hullo . . . HULLOOO!" A pause. "Brangwyn speaking! . . . What's all the schemozzle about? What—— It's damned nonsense! No! No! It's the very dull effort of someone trying to express something . . . what the devil he wants to express, I don't know! I take it you're not going to publish anything in the Press about it—— what? . . . WHAT—— But, the thing's not worth talking about. It's all utter kibosh!" A pause. "No—— KIBOSH!"

Brangwyn hangs up the receiver and falls back into his chair, exasperated. "I don't know what we're coming to, Belleruche. I don't really." Then, leaning over to the sideboard he picks up a reproduction from a work by Picasso: a Harlequin.

"What do you think of this?" he asks.

"It's got a feeling of decoration about it, but I can't say I like it."

* This was added by F. B. when reading the MS.

"No! neither do I. But the critics will tell you it has all kinds of fine ideas behind it. The trouble is, these works are for a superior intelligence. People like myself are not educated up to them, and are not considered the right men to judge them. We haven't got those powers of seeing into the subconscious . . . what?"

I then tell Brangwyn I had a look at the supposed painting by Etty in the "Lanes" at Brighton. He told me that if it was good I was to buy it and he'd make me a swop for it. "I can't make up my mind about that Etty, the woman isn't bad, but the Adonis is poor in drawing. Taking the picture as a whole, the composition isn't very happy."

"Oh, well, if the composition is no good, it loses a great deal of interest for me. What does the fellow want for it?" he inquires casually.

"Thirty shillings."

"Well, you can't go far wrong in buying an Etty for that sum. Next time you're in Brighton I should get it. Ask the fellow to allow you to take it on approval—or should he make any difficulty give him the thirty bob."

"I'll get it on my way home."

"Good. An Etty for thirty bob . . . well, that's a bargain. He was a fine old man was old Etty. When he used to come into the atelier to paint the nude the students would weep at seeing this old man so weak in health still being attracted for this purpose. It's a sign of great humility to do this in one's old age, after a life of devotion to the study of the nude which never flagged . . . especially when one has attained a great reputation as an artist, as he had."

"Perhaps he found difficulty in getting models, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"I shouldn't think so. But I can't help feeling that old Etty had a secret feeling and love for working in company which made him return to the studio, even in his old age . . . the feeling of the student who is for ever learning something new. . . . Rather a beautiful feeling when you come to consider it, what?"

"It certainly is."

"Oh, yes, there's no getting away from the fact. He was a true lover of the nude was old Etty. . . . A very religious man who'd kneel down when he'd done good work and thank God for having helped him to do it. He was a good, simple sort of man, who only lived for his painting. The Venetians made much of him, and said that he worked with the fury of a devil and the sweetness of an angel. As you know, he was a member of their Academy. He should have lived in the days of Tintoretto. The Victorian era rather cramped his output. You know what I mean . . . the prudery that existed at that time."

"Don't you find his nudes a little too classical?"

"Yes, but we have to accept this. It was the spirit of his time. He does it well, and that's all that matters. His best work is when he brings a kind of allegorical background into his pictures, a little improvisation, what?"

"I think I know the type of work you mean. Those where he leaves the backgrounds rather sketchy."

"Yes, but not always. It depends largely on what sort of mood old Etty was in at the time. No, these pictures I'm thinking about are not quite so realistic as the work we continually see of his. They have a little more originality. I had a very fine *Descent from the Cross* of his—a noble work."

"A friend of mine has one of Etty's allegorical works."

"Oh yes, there are quite a tidy few about." He takes hold of Roger's paw and strokes it gently: "Isn't that so, my old Roger boy?" The dog jumps on Brangwyn's knees and tries to lick his face but is pushed away.

"He seems very fond of you."

"A little too fond at times." Roger makes another jump, but is again repulsed and falls on the floor. Brangwyn looks at him and says, laughing: "Hullo! who sent you down there, my little fellow?" He then lights a cigarette and resumes his conversation on the Nude in Art.

"You know, Belleruche, there are too many people to-day who paint the nude and make them sexual. The Old Masters were not like that except when one of them had to please a wealthy patron who had a certain delight in the nasty things

of life. But even then these pictures were not painted in a dirty state of mind. I've thought the matter over and can't help feeling that paintings of the nude have done a great deal of harm. You get very few genuine lovers of the nude, and even when you do, you find something suggestive in their paintings when you look hard enough. That's why it's best left alone—unless of course you have a beautiful mind. But there are very few Fra Angelicos in the world! The great thing in life is *not* what you do, but what you do to others. There's a saying by two Indian philosophers which goes . . .” He tries to remember. “Oh yes. What you throw into the world may be something that'll do great harm. A good action . . . you never know when it will cease doing good. It's in the air, continually doing good, and this applies likewise in the opposite direction for a bad action.” He shakes his head: “And the trouble to-day is that no one puts the brake on a bad action and now look at the result? What is the world coming to, I ask you?”

“But it seems that most of the nude paintings you see to-day are nothing more than crude distortions of nature. Things which are not beautiful to look at.”

“Beautiful to look at! Ha! Ha! These works are nothing more than an insult to the Almighty! They're an insult to man's intelligence! I don't believe that in any period of the history of art has beauty been so outrageously degraded!”

“If only these works could be concealed from the public, the harm would be negligible.”

“But that's the cursed trouble. The wretched things slap you in the face no matter what part of the globe you go to—even if you flee to a desert island. . . .”

“There are more paintings of the nude to-day than of anything else.”

“Well, that just shows you! These paintings are not done to express beauty. If a fellow can show you a freakish woman with limbs like a rhinoceros he feels he's accomplished something in the world of art. Or you get another chap making a fat wench climb a ladder without any clothes on.

He looks at her and says : ' A fine thing ' and away he goes. Now when I paint, I look at the nude as I would a pile of fruit."

" That's the outlook Rubens must have had."

" Yes, Rubens looked at the fat sensual nude as a rich mass of form and colour—part of the whole composition. There's nothing vulgar in his paintings despite what many people in England say. In art there *must be* some convention, some ideal."

" Isn't there too much talk about the canons of art. Surely no two people see a thing in the same manner ? "

" That's true. The real enjoyment of life is to be secret. If you paint a landscape, try to capture it for your own enjoyment as you would a fine dinner."

" That's not always easy."

" I know it's not easy. But a lot of things are not easy and have to be done. Take it from me, there are few people in life who are interested in your affairs. They pretend to be but are not."

" But how about when you find a friend ? "

" A friend ? Yes, I've had many. I've been very fortunate in having those who befriended me. But they were mostly much older—not exactly what you call brothers to whom one might open up one's heart. A real friend in this sense is a very rare thing. You think you have such a friend and start pouring out all your worries. You feel you're entitled to a little sympathy from one whom you think understands you, but do you get it ? "

" Sometimes, Mr. Brangwyn."

" Very rarely, oh, very rarely ! The person you take for a friend (a real friend, I mean) when he hears you're in trouble, usually tells you : ' I say, old chap, I've got to be off ! ' and you're left to carry your burden on your own. That's life ! I've had many a fellow I've thought a friend, but the people who have been the most loyal and helpful to me in life have been those whom I never thought of as friends, fellows usually much older than myself. You *do* find friends, but they're very rare ! The best one I had was my wife."

"Yes. But you were fortunate to have your work to absorb you."

"Oh, I don't know what I should have done without it. I really don't! You see, I've found in my old age that one can choose people who are sympathetic and to whom you can open up your heart and talk freely. One is very rarely oneself in the company of highbrows and you usually end up by becoming a humbug and talking rot."

"Why, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Because you start off by setting yourself a fine ideal and then get mixed up in the company of people who to-day only think of possessions and money. So when you're strong enough to leave their company you find that you've debased yourself. It's very easy to fall. In modern life especially, it's the line of least resistance."

"But don't you feel it's essential for artists to get some sort of contact with others who think like themselves? I don't mean they must necessarily mix with people who paint, but people who have thoughts in common?"

"Of course it is. It's grand to find someone to talk to. The Old Artists were men who had noble ideals. If you find a person with a simple mind, you exchange ideas and impressions, and start doing things. For instance, someone may come into my dining-room one evening after I've finished work, and we begin to talk about the fine qualities of the painting of *Spring* by Botticelli . . . well. . . ." He passes his hand through his silvery white beard. "This immediately sets my mind going to paint a picture. . . . Not a Botticelli. . . . But, inspired by his noble example and work, I turn out a Brangwyn."

Mrs. Peacock comes into the room with some tea . . . lovely hot buttered scones to-day! She lays everything on the table and tells me she'll bring me some apricot jam.

Brangwyn turns round in her direction and sings out before she leaves the room: "You might think of bringing me a glass of water, Lizzie!"

"Why do you always drink water?"

"I did not always take water. In fact, when younger, I

hardly knew what it was. I was a lover of the juice of the grape. I may say that I've sampled all the wines of the earth from the Greek 'Tenedos' to that of Australia—with the exception of the juice of 'Shivas' that our old friend Omar sings about. I gave them all up as far too seductive and dangerous—no use at all if you want to work. Delightful it was to sit under a pergola in the South, sipping, say, a glass of 'Asti' or 'Falerno.' Water is best for work." Then looking at my scones, "You'd better eat those while they're hot. I bet it's good stuff, what?"

"It certainly is."

"You're damn lucky to get it. I never used to get these luxuries when I was your age."

He sees a magazine on the French Impressionists and picks it up, skipping through the pages as I pour out the tea. Then he starts a conversation on the subject. "When you come to think of it, the true Impressionist in art has not yet existed, Belleruche."

"I don't quite understand. How about Monet?"

"Monet?" he shouts, throwing the magazine over my two remaining scones. Apologising, he continues: "Monet is no Impressionist, nor is Manet, nor Degas, nor Renoir. Of course they're not. An impression is a thing of the moment. You sit down to paint it . . . but in five minutes it's all gone and another impression has taken its place." He takes a sip from his glass. "That's the curse of painting out of doors. A flash of cloud has gone in the fraction of a second! Monet doesn't give you a first impression. It's all false—an arrangement of a thousand and one different impressions."

"Well, what is your idea of an Impressionist then?"

"The fellow who goes to nature and gets *one* impression . . . a movement of the sea, a bunch of flowers, a fleeting cloud, a woman with the sun reflecting off a blue skirt. Such a fellow makes a few rapid strokes in his sketch book, indicates the colours, and returns to the studio to knock up a picture of what he has recorded in his mind, using the notes he has made in his sketch book. That, in my opinion, is as

near as possible a first impression. You see colour one moment when studying from nature and by the time you've mixed everything on your palette you see something quite different. Things change quickly."

"So, in a sense, the Old Masters were nearer to Impressionism, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Yes. Take Turner. He is a real Impressionist. He gives you the suggestion of a storm or a sunset—an impression of something. But, the so-called 'nothing but paint' is very interesting but not an impression. The best way to make an impressionistic painting is to shove down all you see in a sketch book, everything that meets your eye, foliage, people walking, sitting, and sleeping. If you see a fleeting cloud, just indicate the colours and a few strokes to convey the movement."

"I suppose that is the way your paintings are done?"

"Some of them, yes. When you get an effect of light and colour changing the whole time—I can't see any other way. If you train your memory and colour senses, it's amazing . . . remarkable, what you can hoard up in your mind. I don't know of any man who is *really* a true Impressionist. That's why it's all so damn silly to call oneself an Impressionist."

He leaves the room for a moment and sings out from the passage: "I'll be back in less than half a sec.!" Then, very faintly: "Have suddenly remembered a little job that wants attending to in the studio. Pick up a book and read until I come back. You'll find one on the sideboard."

Absent for ten minutes, he returns carrying two lovely old Chinese masks. Roger pushes the door open and leads the way.

"How about this?" he sings out, holding a painted death mask to the light. "You can have it to hang up in your studio."

"Rather a grim looking affair, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Probably taken from the death bed of a Chinese notoriety? It has something curiously haunting about it, something mystical." He hands the two masks over for me to look at. "Take them home with you. I think I can find you one or

two more next time you come. There's one, if only I can lay my hands on it . . . it's a fine looking head with a tiny pointed wiry beard . . . real hairs! I pulled one of them out to satisfy myself." Picking up the masks, he takes a final look at them and then pushes them into my case. "Take care of these, they're rare pieces."

"Thank you, Mr. Brangwyn."

The telephone is heard ringing. My heart jumps, thinking it might be father saying there is news from Lambotte. I wait patiently as Brangwyn goes to answer. He turns round and tells me to go home quietly.

"It's New York calling me!" he murmurs hastily. "Let me know the moment you hear from Lambotte. . . ."



X

THOUGHTS ON ART AND RELIGION

AFTER waiting another five days I receive news from Sir Paul Lambotte who says he would like to see me as soon as possible—the matter is urgent.

I go over to Ditchling and find Brangwyn sheltering in a corner of the garden. His face is completely covered by a creamy-white panama hat which he removes suddenly on hearing my footsteps.

"Hullooo! Any luck, Belleruche?" giving me a sailor-like wink which turns his expression into a broad welcoming smile.

"Yes. Good news, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Ah! What did Lambotte say?"

"He wants to see me immediately. Next week if possible. But I could leave at the end of this."

"Yes. Why not? Now, tell us what he says about the Hotel Arents . . . read the letter quick——"

Making a rapid translation from the French I give him a

general outline of the letter. "Lambotte says he'd like to discuss the gift with me personally. He wants to find out whether you would be prepared to present enough pictures to fill the whole building, and says that, unofficially, the Mayor and Aldermen of Bruges have agreed to convert the Hotel Arents into a Brangwyn Museum."

"That's marvellous, what?"

"He mentions about 400 works."

Brangwyn seems a little frightened at the figure and replies cautiously: "Well, well . . . the question is, have I got the stuff? I've already given so much away all over the shop." Then, tilting his panama on one side and adopting a 'Frans Hals like' appearance, he smiles and says: "Yes! We shall manage it all right. When are you leaving?"

"Saturday, I think."

"Rather in a hurry, what?"

"It's important."

"Well, perhaps it's as well. Tell our friend Lambotte, nothing would bring me greater joy in my old age than to feel I'm remembered in Bruges, the city of my birth. Nothing finer!"

"The news is excellent. Will you see that no one gets to hear about it in Ditchling. . . . You know what it is. . . . People talk and . . ."

"I never talk—— You're the one who does the talking, so be careful. . . ."

Brangwyn gets up saying it's too hot in the sun. As we make our way indoors he points to a few garden ornaments: A curious circular stone carving of an angel arrests his attention. "You see that . . ." he says, pointing to it with his walking stick. "It's a bit of pure Renaissance . . . too good to be stuck in the wall—but it looks well. I always feel, if you have something beautiful—it's far better to stick it where you can see it."

"It looks fine."

"Yes, but this particular stone'll be eaten up with the weather. I ought to take it indoors."

Arriving near the house he sees a subject for a painting, and

calls out suddenly: "Stop there! Don't move . . . don't move! What a composition . . . the light coming behind the old laurel tree throwing those heavy shadows against the red brick wall—" He shakes his head: "If I were younger, I'd get out my paints and knock up a sketch on the spot . . ."

He then sees another subject. "It's *you* this time! Now, if I were to paint your portrait—I'd get you to pose next to that little stone cherub with those lovely nasturtiums in the background. . . . I'd make you wear that Spanish costume I spoke to you about. You'd look fine in that. . . ."

We then go along the passage into the dining-room. As we open the door, he exclaims: "You've got the Spanish type, Belleruche. Any Spanish blood in you?"

"Not that I know of."

"Oh, I think you must have."

"Anyway—Spanish blood or no Spanish blood, I'd love to have you paint my portrait."

"You shall have it the next fine afternoon. You'd make an interesting study grouped next to that little stone cherub and the orange nasturtiums with a fragment of that dark laurel in the background."

"Yes. But why the cherub?"

His expression of amusement turns into a broad smile as he explains: "I always see a picture as a whole—that's my way of painting. A head on its own . . . well, it's not always very interesting. . . . Sometimes perhaps, and other times it's damned boring, what? Now, in your case, I was seeing a fine composition. You'd be standing there as a Spaniard and not as a portrait," he ends, pushing open the passage door.

Taking a seat in the dining-room he turns the conversation to Bruges and my trip to Brussels. "It's about the monks I want to talk to you. It's a delicate question and has to be handled with great diplomacy. I don't want them to feel that we've double-crossed them in arranging the exhibition in Bruges. When you're in Brussels, I'd like you to nip along to the monastery and have a talk with the Abbot.



F.B. AND THE AUTHOR DISCUSS THE TREATMENT OF CHERUBS.

Tell him all that's happened, and say he'll benefit by this change of plans in the end. Tell him the monastery'll get most of my religious drawings after the exhibition."

"But if it turns out a Brangwyn Museum?"

"Oh, I'd forgotten. Yes, that's going to make things a bit difficult. I've first of all got to find the stuff to fill the building and *then* we'll look out all we can for the monastery."

He moves his chair and pushes it up to the table. "I'd like the monks to get a square deal. They *must* have the works we promised them and many others. I hope to be able to paint special pictures for them—and have one or two large cartoons representing the *Life of Saint Aidan*. They could have these for their refectory. Yes, it'd be a good place for them. Something for the monks to look at when they sit down and have their grub."

"I wish they'd had them when I was staying there. I might have felt better after having their queer soup!"

"Yes, yes, that was bad luck," he replies with a jovial chuckle. "But you got over it all right. Now, if I were you, I'd take another look at their refectory. Get the size of the wall space . . . get your monk friend to take the measurements——"

"I'll see to that."

"Good. That's one thing settled. Then, I'd like you to look up some of the Bruges artists . . . make friends with them . . . give them my kind regards and say I'm looking forward to the day when I come and paint with them by the canals as in the old days." Lighting a cigarette and sending out smoke from the corners of his mouth. "Don't forget I was born in Bruges—and now that I'm getting advanced in years . . . I rather feel like the *Prodigal Son* who returns to his family." Passing his hand over his brow he continues softly: "As my father and mother are no longer there, I'd like you to make a few new friends so that when (if God permits) I return to Bruges, I shan't arrive there without knowing a soul."

"I can well understand."

"Yes, my heart has always been in Bruges."

"And soon now your works will find a permanent home there."

Brangwyn changes his position and walks to the seat by the window carrying his cushion under his arm. The sun plays around his fingers as he begins to talk of his early days. "Often, when I look back on my life and the things I've done—I realise the awful swab I've been. If only I'd had a little more courage when I was young. . . . Yes, courage——" he repeats, raising his voice. "And hadn't thought so much about myself. I've always regretted leaving my parents when I might have done finer work with them by me. We owe so much to our parents. . . . The trouble is when one is young—we have a spirit of adventure that makes us want to see the world, and we forget everything else." Resting his back against the red brick wall he takes an argumentative puff at his cigarette. "Yes, that's been my trouble, Belleruche."

"But why? You've worked very hard."

"And I could have done a lot more." His thoughts return to Bruges. "My father loved the old city and regretted leaving it. I wonder what he'd say if he knew that his son had got mixed up with the monks of Saint André. . . ."

"I'd like to speak to the monks about him. Perhaps they'll tell me some interesting things about his work."

"I'm sure they will. It was my father who designed the building of the Church of St. André in Bruges, so he must have known the monks of his day."

"That's very interesting. Then the monks are sure to know all about him. I'll try to collect some notes when I go over to see them."

"I wish you would. No doubt one of the older ones will remember my godfather, Monseigneur de Boon. My father has had many associations with the place. He also restored the Chapel of the Holy Blood. See what you can find out about him."

Roger comes running into the room evidently feeling he has some right to be in the picture at this particular moment. He jumps on his master's knees, then on to the chair, sends all

my papers flying on to the floor and bolts into the kitchen barking loudly.

Brangwyn tries to attract him but without success. "He must have smelt a rat or the remains of the cold chicken. Poor little fellow . . . I often wonder what goes on in his mind?"

"He's very affectionate."

"Affectionate—he's more than that . . . he's the best pal I've got, old Roger is. I don't know what I'd do without him as I sit here alone in the evening . . . and when I'm ill—he's wonderful."

The Master then wonders whether the monks would do something in memory of his father and mother. "Do you think we could get them to put up a plaque or something in their memory?" he asks in a contemplative voice. "When you're talking to the Abbot, you might ask him if he'd allow me to design a little memorial tablet they'd put up in the monastery. Just a simple affair that would be a memento of the work my father did in Bruges. It would be nice to know that the monks offered up a few prayers occasionally to their memory. Perhaps they'd do this after I'd made my gift to the monastery, what?"

"Probably so. I'll speak to the Abbot about it."

"No, not now. Later, when I've done something for them. . . ."

"Then I'll wait till after the exhibition."

"Yes. There's no hurry." His voice becomes serious as he continues: "Of course, these memorial tablets and ceremonies are usually overdone. I always believe in simplicity where these things are concerned. In general there's always too much pomp connected with deaths and burials, etc. Take funerals, for instance. A friend of mine (an Italian) came to see me at Ditchling. I put him up at the local pub and asked the proprietor to give him the best of everything. But the poor fellow died there. We buried him in the little village graveyard and gave him a nice simple stone with his name cut in good well-designed lettering—something unpretentious and dignified. The sort of thing

I'd like for myself when I kick the bucket. Well, what do you think happened when his friends came? . . . Were they pleased?—No, sir! When they went to the churchyard they were furious, and said this humble tombstone was ridiculous for a man who'd had such and such honours, who'd done this and that, and was a mighty big figure in their country. They told me he was worthy of a grand affair and that we had given him a poor man's funeral. What they *would* have liked was one of those piles of angels in white marble like in the Campo Santa at Genoa."

He gets a little angry at the memory: "All this offended against my sense of taste and I was furious! I felt like telling the friends that these little worldly things were NOTHING. This all goes to show how much people are attached to the opinions of others . . . it's pathetic when one comes to think of it. Now this old Italian was a friend of mine, and I felt I was doing the sort of thing that *he* would have liked."

Then speaking with a deep severe voice. "These funeral ceremonies serve for the pomp satisfaction of the living. In life . . . there are three great occasions for celebration and for showing off in the eyes of their friends . . . Births . . . Marriages . . . and Deaths." Pausing a moment. "Death is a show for the survivors. Nine out of ten people get publicity out of this and disport themselves in the eyes of the world."

Brangwyn's voice drops almost to a whisper: "It's all wrong . . . terribly wrong, this display and show. I don't believe in it. It's irreverent. Now, if a great friend of mine were to die . . . someone I loved dearly . . . I'd like to bury him in the middle of the night . . . secretly, quietly, not a soul to disturb you. Unfortunately, the law does not allow it."

As he concludes, I try to picture his thoughts. A wonderful subject for a painting. He then begins to talk about his own religion and why he so rarely goes to church. "It is difficult for one to give one's whole attention to prayer in a crowded church. Why, I don't know. I prefer to pray

in solitude. Did not Our Lord say to the Woman of Samaria . . . *The Father seeketh not worshippers in the Temple, but those who in secret worship in spirit and truth.* Anyway, I am the loser, as one should make oneself do the right thing. The Church is the society of the faithful, established by Our Lord Jesus Christ—and it is one's duty and should be one's joy to hear Mass."

"But will people whose whole life is a continual contradiction of Right and Duty get help by going to church?"

"Yes. It is difficult for a man to do anything alone. But the companionship of the faithful will help him. The Church was established to this end, I take it. Anyway, it's a fine discipline."

"That's what I feel about it."

"And so you should. The trouble is that people like us who have what is called the artistic temperament think too much of our own feelings and in the end become slack and lazy in such matters. It is impossible to guide one's life by human policy alone. Anyway. You take it from me that RELIGION inspires one to a higher state of mind. People of an artistic temperament are like a piece of wire strung up on an open window . . . affected by every breath of wind that comes along, strong or weak."

"You mean they can't concentrate or forget the surroundings."

"Yes. But you're young. You should try to dominate these feelings and train your mind to concentrate on the beauty of the Mass. When you're old, it's more difficult and sometimes impossible. Now when I happen to be passing a church, no matter whether it's Catholic or Protestant, I like to go inside and sit down all alone. There's something very restful in such places."

"Catholic or Protestant?"

"Yes. It doesn't matter whether it's Catholic or Protestant—the place is sanctified by hundreds and thousands of people who have prayed there and created an atmosphere of sanctity. This should prove that the Church is the most necessary form of everyday life. I know men who go to

Mass on their way to business ; they are the better for it and their business far more honest. If one prays under a tree with a beautiful landscape—you've got all the leaves, plants, and all sorts of things moving about the whole time. It's all too disturbing."

"But isn't love of nature—Prayer?"

"So it is often said. But it seems to me rather just satisfaction of one's sense of the beautiful—a selfish and sensual feeling."

"Yes, I suppose it is. And yet, if *your* work isn't religious—why do the monks ask for it to hang on the walls of their monastery?"

"Because they look at Art as a symbol, which is right, in the Church."

"I suppose there must be exceptions for people like yourself for example?"

"Oh, I don't know. Possibly. I always say—Each man to himself. If we were all to accept this, the world wouldn't be in such a turmoil as it is to-day. There's too much poking one's nose into other people's affairs; and when you come to consider it all . . . I don't care a damn what other people say. Life is difficult enough for oneself. Poking one's nose into other people's affairs doesn't lead to anything except trouble."

"Then you believe all religions have good in them?"

"Of course they have. The Buddhist is just as sincere in his worship as we are." Pausing a moment. "If ever *you* decide to become a Catholic and feel that by doing so it will help you to lead a better life . . . well—become a Catholic! But if you *do* become one—— make sure you're prepared to do all the Catholic Church tells you. There are certain conditions which are very difficult for people who have the artistic temperament."

"Anyway, I don't see why *you* should worry about your religion, Mr. Brangwyn. You have done your work."

"Yes, I know. I'm only thinking that if we give these drawings to the monks of St. André we may be asked certain questions about our religious views—— I'm afraid that if

the Abbot finds out I don't go to Mass on Sundays . . . he'll think I'm a rotten Catholic——”

“I don't think so. He's a very broadminded person.”

“Well, may be so.”

“Then why worry? They are receiving a gift of your work, aren't they?”

“Yes! Yes! But the monks might like to feel that the artist who painted the pictures is a *devout* Catholic. . . .”

“When they see the feeling you have put into your interpretations of Christ—they'll say you are an essentially religious man.”

“Let us hope so.”

As he leaves the room for a few moments to see his assistant in the studio all kinds of thoughts pass through my mind. I think of the wonderful humility of a true artist. . . . “The finest of all Religions” . . . I say to myself.

I hear Brangwyn coming down the passage. He steps into the room, holding a beautiful old Persian pot which he tells me to add to my collection. I pack up the treasure carefully and leave it on the sideboard ready to pick up when I leave.

At that moment Lizzie arrives with a bunch of crimson and pink roses which she places in a cut-crystal vase. Brangwyn cannot take his eyes off them and exclaims as he goes to smell the bouquet:

“Fantin-Latour! . . . What an exquisite perfume!”



He then removes the vase from the table and places it by the sideboard near the window, underneath an Italian primitive of Saint Sebastian. “Look at the sun filtering behind those petals!” he bursts out. “I don't believe any artist could ever paint that translucent effect—not even Fantin! It's wonderful, what?”

Mrs. Peacock returns to the room with some tea. The Master takes another sniff at the roses and then

addresses her. "You musn't make a habit of this, Lizzie, It's only because Mr. de Belleroyche is going abroad that we're giving him the feast."

Leaving the room again he says he will be back in ten minutes. I prepare rough notes of final things to ask him before I leave for Brussels. He returns, holding two etchings in his hands.

"I want you to give this one to Lambotte. It's the *Old Mill at Dixmude*."

"He'll be delighted with it."

"And how about that one?" he asks, leaning a large print against the back of the Jacobean chair. "It's the *Bridge at Mostar* . . . do you like it?"

"Yes. It's a well-known one."

"And now become a rare print. I don't believe I could find another copy—not even if the Pope wanted one." He rolls them up and wraps them in a piece of brown paper which he fetches out of the Flemish cabinet. "There you are! Give these to Lambotte with my kind regards."

"Thank you. Now, there's just one point I'd like to ask you before I leave. Can I say that you are prepared to present a collection of about four hundred works to Belgium on the condition that the town of Bruges makes a permanent museum bearing your name?"

"Yes. That seems to be what they are wishful to do."

"Of course they are."

"Well, I leave it to you to act as you think best. You know my feelings about the whole thing. But don't forget to point out, it's not the exhibition I want . . . I'm tired of these things. It's the joy of feeling that some of my work rests in the town of my birth and that the people of Bruges will enjoy looking at them. Do you understand?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"All right. I also want you to go and see the monks and speak to the Abbot about the whole thing. You might bring up the question of the Saint Aidan murals for the refectory. By the way, I had given them to the Art Gallery in Birmingham, and they couldn't find a wall large enough for them so I



"GO AND HAVE A LOOK AT THE HOUSE I WAS BORN IN, NEAR THE CATHEDRAL,
24 RUE DU VIEUX BOURG."

[Facing page 110]

made an exchange. Let me know how the monks feel about these. Don't say anything about our talk on religion. This is a matter which only concerns themselves. Later, when (if ever) the Abbot comes to see me, we might discuss all these matters with him over a cup of tea. But *don't* say anything now."

Although I send Brangwyn two telegrams, an express letter, and make a 'phone call—he exhibits his extraordinary powers of silence.

On my return I find him in the garden painting a sundial a lovely cobalt blue. Roger rushes across the lawn and shoves his nose against my trousers announcing my arrival.

Brangwyn turns round holding a paint brush in his hand and throws his arm forward in a grandiose manner:

"Half a second, Belleruche! I want to put a finishing touch to the old sundial. It gives it a new life and keeps the rain out."

Roger runs up and sniffs around my parcels as the Master lays his brush on the foot of the sundial.

"You see that blue . . ." he exclaims with an air of satisfaction. "Well, it's not *one blue*, but a thousand blues each time the light changes."



We walk over to the far end of the lawn, Brangwyn stooping on the way to pick up a few weeds: "It's to make room for other things to spring up," he says, smiling and taking hold of my parcel. "What's in here—something from Lambotte?" he asks, fingering it about.

"Something from the monks, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Ah——" he exclaims in excitement. "What can it be? What on earth have you got here, it's all squashy!"

"A cheese."

"What, another one?"

"Yes, it's one specially picked out for you by the Father Abbot."

He brings it up to his nose and takes a good sniff.

"Ahum! Ahum! I'm a bit of a connoisseur on the matter. The trouble with these monastery cheeses is they're too young." He lays it on the seat and tells me to thank the Abbot for his kind thought. "Say, I'll get you to take over one of our good Stiltons, something that'll make the monks sit up, what? I've a sort of feeling they might take a fancy to them. Talking of cheese, I remember when old Antonelli, the model, returned from a visit to his home near Monte Cassino. He brought me a small cheese. Very kind of him, but it was awful! I had to tie a wet cloth over my mouth and dig a hole in the garden to bury it. For days, the house was awful! Some of these native cheeses are very tasty, but before you get any fun out of them one must stuff cotton wool in the nose," he ends with a smile, then asks suddenly: "Well, what did Lambotte have to tell you?"

"It's all fixed."

"What's fixed? Have you decided to become a monk?"

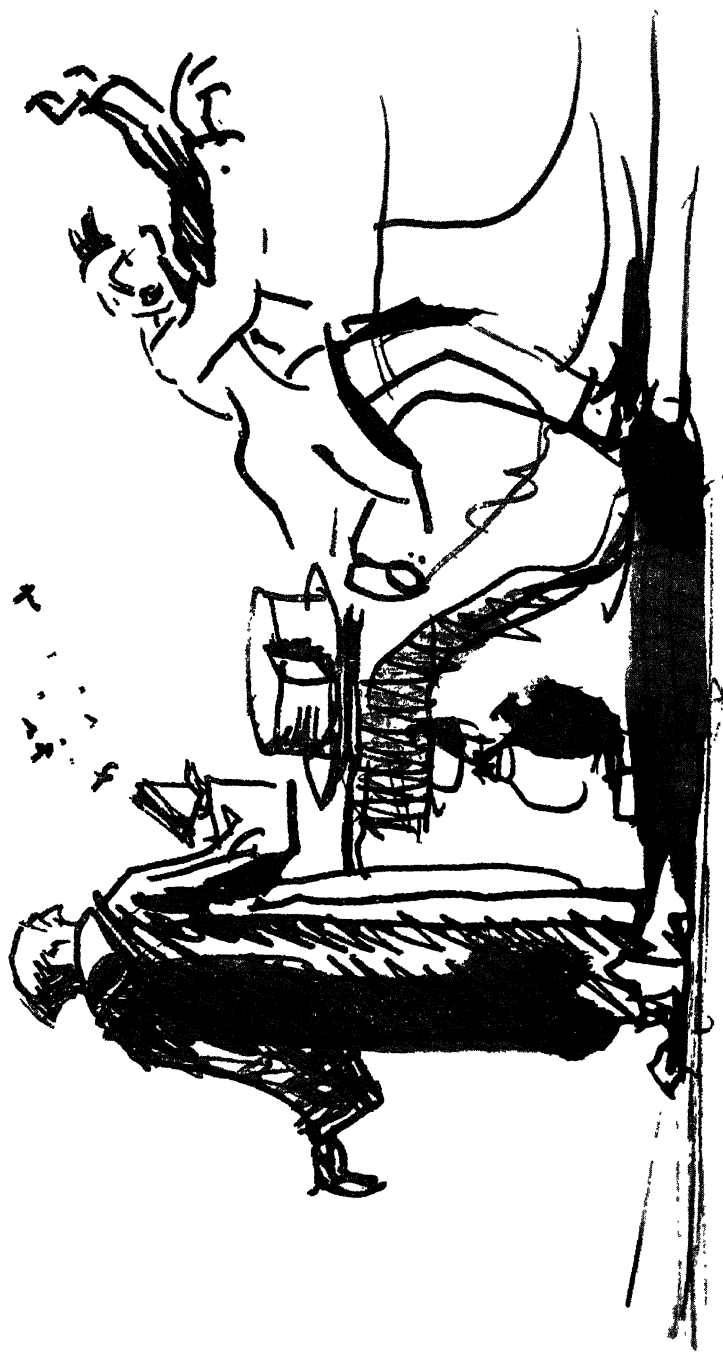
"No. The museum."

"What—— Has Lambotte got the consent from the Bruges officials?"

"Unofficially . . . yes. I went over the building with him and made a rough estimate of how many works would be required to fill it. He gave me some plans."

"Have you got them there?"

"I left them at home."



"THE MONASTIC CHEESE."

"Well, bring them over to-morrow afternoon and we'll go through the whole thing together."

"Lambotte is really excited about it."

"I'm glad to hear that. What a pity I can't come over with you and join in the fun?"

"Why don't you?"

"How can you suggest such things? Look at me. . . . I'm an old man. If I were young it'd be a different matter. To-day, I feel like an old tree full of sores with just a few young leaves sprouting from the top . . . that's F.B."

"The change would do you good."

"It's no use, I tell you. I have all sorts of physical troubles which prevent me travelling."

"Well, we shall think of you."

"And I'll be with you all in spirit. You'll get some letters from me with a few sketches to cheer you up, but don't show them!"

"Why not?"

"It's better not. Often when I sit down at my desk I let my pen run, and sometimes it runs faster than I can stop it and I find myself doing all kinds of things I've no business to do . . . caricatures of some of my greatest and dearest friends. I don't mean to hurt their feelings, but sometimes I've done so, to my regret."

"I'll keep them to myself, then."

"Now mind you do or you won't get any more!"



I then begin to tell him about my arrival at the monastery. "It was 2 p.m. when I called there. I rang the bell, but couldn't get any reply. I thought the whole place had closed down. Then just as I was getting ready to take a walk round the building, a red-haired monk wearing a blue apron came to open the door. I think he must have been the chef. He greeted me with a friendly smile

and said: 'Ah, Monsieur Brangwyn!' I replied that I was *not* Mr. Brangwyn, but only his representative. He was quite confused and said it was the fault of some of the monks who'd told him that you had been a frequent visitor to the monastery."

The Master's laugh shakes the whole seat: "It's damn funny . . . I can't get over that, Belleruche!" Then controlling himself. "And what did you tell him?"

"That you were hoping to come one day."

"Yes, yes, and did you repeat your tale to the Abbot?"

"Yes. . . ."

"How did he take it?"

"He laughed and said the monk should have known better."

"Oh, poor fellow. He was probably made to scrub floors for that?"

"I don't think so. He gave me the impression of a monk who likes to have his own way."

"Now, that's a serious affair. One of the reasons why I never joined a Monastic Order. I'd be hitting the Abbot over the head the whole time for telling me to do things I didn't like to do. But once you're roped into the Order, then you must do as you're told."

"It must be a very strict life."

"Habit, my dear sir? You soon get shaped into it."

He brings out a "du Maurier" cigarette and rests it on his knee as I continue my story. "The red-haired monk asked me to come inside and led me to the same room, 'Saint Hugo,' where I'd slept before. The bed had been made—so my visit was obviously expected. When I was ready, the monk asked me to follow him into the Chapter Room where he said I would be allowed to see a very interesting ceremony actually taking place. I was anxious to know what was going on there, and asked him to tell me about it. He gave me a broad inviting grin and said: 'Four young men like yourself . . .' Looking at his watch. 'Yes, this very moment—are going through one of the most important moments of their life. They are leaving the world, and all its

artificial pleasures, to serve their Maker. They are joining the Benedictine Order.' I wasn't sure whether I was going to enjoy myself in the Chapter Room; however, I followed the monk down the steps into the cloisters leading to the place where the ceremony was being held. He opened the door and thrust me inside. It would be difficult, almost impossible, to describe the setting of the room and all that was going on there. I felt a curious sort of sensation that I was one of the four. . . ."

"Quite, quite! Didn't you see your monk friend in the room? You know. The one who looked after you during your last stay."

"Yes. He was standing by the door. I started saying: 'How do you do?' But all I got was a severe bow and '*après la cérémonie*' in a whisper.

"I threw a glance at the end of the hall where great things were taking place. The Father Abbot was dressed in gorgeous robes, sitting on a throne in front of an altar decorated with white lilies and lovely green foliage.

"He was reading prayers in Latin and seemed terribly moved—his voice rising to a strong fortissimo and then ending with a diminishing pianissimo.

"All around him were rows and rows of monks in their black cassocks, but many of them were dressed in beautiful brocades glittering in the sunshine that was pouring through the windows.

"The address in Latin was a long one. I had time to look round the hall, and it was then I saw the most impressive sight of the whole ceremony—something you would have painted, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Ah! What was that?"

"The fathers of the young men. They were aged and poor, Flemish peasants, with lovely, almost saintly faces. Two of them were leaning on sticks; they seemed infirm, and the whole ceremony was too much for them—not so much the strain of standing up, but this great division in their lives. I tried to picture what they were thinking. One of them looked very ill and nearly broke down as the Abbot was delivering a

magnificent sermon in French, his words ringing through the entire building. He said: 'You realise the great sacrifice you are making, my sons. It is one that you have chosen so as to serve your Creator and Saviour Jesus Christ——''

"I saw one of the aged parents burying his face in a large red handkerchief making a vivid contrast against his white beard and greeny-black overcoat. I believe he had to be taken out. The last I saw of him was when a monk was trying to hold him up.

"We then came to the moment when the young men had their woollen belts taken off and replaced by leather ones. This meant they could never leave the Order."

Brangwyn gets up from the seat to change his position.

"Yes, that's the final step before becoming a monk," he exclaims. "What happened next?"

"The Kissing of Feet."

"Gosh, that must have been a fine sight!"

"Yes. The ceremony started by a small monk carrying a basin and towel. He led the way, followed by the Abbot and all the monks of the Chapter Room. When he got to the first (now ordained monk) he bent down and washed his feet. The Abbot went down on his knees and kissed them. Then they did the same to the three others. When the Abbot returned to his throne, he said in flowing words: 'This is to show that we are all *one* in serving our Master.'

"A few more prayers were said, and then I seem to remember seeing the four young monks lying flat on their stomachs on an enormous carpet spread out in front of the altar. This was the final moment. They remained there for some time in prayer and then the Abbot, followed by the other monks, went down the hall in single file and left the Chapter Room.

"I was struck by the impression of happiness on the faces of the four young monks. They ran up to their parents and kissed them. But I only saw three of them, so I don't know what happened to the old man who was taken ill."

"Poor old soul. I expect he was sitting outside in the cloister. . . ."

Brangwyn recalls the large carpet I mentioned. "I don't know whether I've ever shown you some designs I used to make for carpets? Well, I'd rather like to design one for the Chapter Room. It's a wonderful subject. I could make a drawing symbolising the monks lying down flat on it in prayer."

"That's a lovely idea."

"Well, tell the Abbot I'll do it."

"In that case, the whole Chapter Room will be your work . . . the windows, carpets, and Stations of the Cross."

"I've let myself in for a tidy bit of work. I only hope I live long enough to do it."

He asks me to follow him and leads the way to the kitchen garden where he points to some extraordinary vegetation. "That stuff over there with huge foliage is rhubarb. I was instrumental in introducing this to Japan. The acid taste rather appealed to their palate. A Japanese naval officer who stayed with me many years ago in London liked it so much that he took some roots over."

He then asks me to give him more details about the Chapter Room.

"One thing I remember is that I couldn't sleep that night. The aged parents kept on coming into my thoughts and I tried to visualise what they were thinking. After two hours rolling about in bed I decided to get up, and wandered about the cloisters where everything was so peaceful.

"There was a delicious scent of roses and rhododendrons coming from the monastery garden. The night was clear and heavenly with millions of stars in the sky. I sat down on one of the stone seats next to a huge pillar. As the monastery clock was striking twelve I began pondering what I should have to tell the Abbot regarding the exhibition of your works . . . the change of our plans.

"Just as my thoughts were dwelling on this I heard a rustling, mysterious sort of noise at the far end of the cloister. I took a peep round the side of the pillar and tried to find out what was going on—a black silhouette flitted past, carrying

an enormous bunch of white lilac into the chapel . . . a monk decorating the altar at midnight.

"I walked up towards the large statue of Saint André at the far end of the cloister. The moon was throwing a range of curious mauvey-blueey-purple shadows over the plaster figure. I stood in front of it for some time and thought what a fine idea it was to have statues with large simple effects of draperies where the light could play such an important part.

"I took a scarlet rose from my buttonhole and placed it gently at the feet of Saint André. This little note of colour looked very striking. I was studying the effect when I heard some one shuffling down the cloister. The monk had finished his task and had come to ask what I was doing at this hour of the night when everyone was supposed to be in bed. I asked him to allow me to stay as I found the cloisters more restful than my bedroom. He replied kindly as he removed his little pointed hood: 'Sleep is valuable to young people,' and then, quietly went away, fingering his rosary and fondling the beads.

"A few moments later I heard sweet sounds coming from the direction of the Chapter Room. The music grew louder and louder as I walked down the cloister. Then, it became very distinct . . . some pieces by Bach played on the organ. I listened outside until it was over, and then slowly pushed open the door.

"An elderly grey-haired monk was at the organ. He had already started his second piece (more Bach) when he noticed my presence. He immediately stopped playing, and put his music into a black leather case. I told him I was sorry to have interrupted his lovely melody and asked if he would continue playing.

"The monk smiled softly, and said he only came to play in the evenings when all was quiet and the monastery was asleep. . . . 'My music is very restful to me,' he said, 'particularly when I've had a tiring day.' . . ."

"Did you find out the name of the monk?" Brangwyn interrupts.

"I never asked. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I just thought that as he was an artist he might care to have something to hang up in his cell."

"I'm sure he would."

"Well, remind me to look something out. I'd like to give the fellow a picture he could stick up on the wall of his cell. It's so rare to find modest people, nowadays . . . very rare! All artists should be modest and work for the love of the thing, what?"

He points to some huge tomatoes. "Like the man who grows these. He doesn't go shouting all over the place that he's grown tomatoes of an extraordinary size. And, in my opinion, *that fellow* is doing something as worthy as the other man who gets out his paints and tries to put them on canvas. To grow a fine crop of tomatoes means you've got to be an artist and have a real love for nature." Then glancing at his lettuces, "How about these? Fine specimens, what? You've never tasted my lettuces, have you?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, what do you think of them?"

"Excellent. . . ."

"Yes, and I can make a good salad when I want to."

He walks back towards the house and whistles for Roger. We see him running in circles on the lawn. I ask what he is doing. He smiles and says: "Oh, his usual little game . . . trying to catch his tail!"

We go indoors and sit down in the dining-room. I notice a gorgeous azalea by the window—an indescribable pink with streaks of orange in the centre.

Brangwyn sees the flower and fixes his eyes on it for a considerable time. "Well, that's Mrs. Peacock's job. She takes a great interest in these plants and always sees that I get something beautiful to look at in my dining-room. Whenever she thinks she's got a bit of colour, she comes and tells me to look at it and says it ought to be painted. But I never seem to do it, somehow. Now, if your father was here and started knocking up a sketch of these azaleas, I'd probably get all worked up and start having a slog at it myself."

Brangwyn sits down and lets his mind wander on the monastery episode. He says he would like to meet the Abbot and have a talk to him about his own religion.

"I'm a bad Catholic, I know, Belleruche, but I'd like to ask the Abbot if he feels I'm as bad as I think I am."

"I know what he would say, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Well, *I don't* know. I'd like to find out." He twists himself round in his chair and says: "The way to live is as if Christ was sitting at the end of your table. That's how everyone should live."

He places a Bible on the table and sinks back in his chair, taking on the expression of a man who looks back on his early life and wonders whether he has completed his mission.

For a few moments he remains silent—his eyes covered with a misty veil, staring at me, and yet—very far away. He speaks with a slow, solemn voice: "When I look back on my past, I think of all the things I might have done if I'd had a little more courage. But I never had any money to start with, and for a fellow to start life on those conditions is a very difficult thing. No matter, whether you have a fine nature . . . (even the qualities of a Saint) there are certain bad influences which filter in and lead you astray.

"No, when starting a career it's a terrible misfortune to have no money, and leads you off the track. When I was young I mixed with all sorts of rogues, and have to thank the Almighty that I never turned out a bigger blackguard than I am. Of course I had my Art which was my real ideal in life, and that was what saved me.

"I only wish I hadn't messed about so much in my youth. I might have done better work. When one spends so much time in life with people who are a hindrance to you and your work, it's dangerous. So many people have nothing to do and want you to fool around with them.

"Now, had I had a bit of money, enough to live on, I should have avoided coming into contact with these people who, nine times out of ten, leave bad traits in you that you can't get rid of.

"For instance, there's nothing I hate more than using bad

language. If I hear a fellow swearing, I get shocked, and want to tell him so. The trouble is I keep on swearing myself. Although, mind you, there's never any thought of beastliness behind it, even if I *do say* 'Damn the fellow.'

"Another trouble that comes from mixing with the wrong people. You become suspicious. Now I hate people who are suspicious . . . and yet, I've had so many people doing me in that I've become suspicious against my own nature. Even to-day, although I try not to be suspicious about people, I can't help having at times that double thought at the back of my mind."

He sits up in his chair and says a few final words. "You can take advice from an old man who's had some experience of life. The great thing to prevent evils growing out of all sorts of iniquities is to choose the right companions, genuine good people. The more I think of these things, the more I feel I should have been a better artist if I'd stayed at home with my mother." He sinks back in his chair, and finishes softly: "We have no greater friends than our mothers. With her by my side I should have done better work. . . ."

"And now, Bruges is going to honour you."

"Very nice to know that. I come back like the *Prodigal Son* and hope they'll think I've turned out good, what?"

Brangwyn then tells me he wants to have a rest and asks me to come over to-morrow afternoon. As I leave the room he says: "And don't forget to bring the plan of the Hotel Arents . . ."



XI

BRANGWYN IN HIS STUDIO

THE sun is scorching as I leave the following afternoon. People are walking about the streets carrying their jackets under their arms. The ticket collector at Hassocks station tells me it's the warmest day we've had. I decide to walk down to Ditchling instead of taking the bus, and stop *en route* to have an ice-cream. By the time I arrive at the JOINTURE my collar and tie are off.

Mrs. Peacock opens the door and tells me the Master is in the studio turning over all sorts of drawings and moving large tempera paintings. She adds, with her customary devotion: "I hope he won't hurt himself. . . . Some of these pictures are very heavy."

I hurry along, and find Brangwyn in shirt sleeves, kneeling on the ground, unrolling a huge mural and doing all he can to prevent Roger stepping on it. His arms are covered with tattoo marks . . . all kinds of curious signs, including a large anchor. . . . "I shall have to ask him all about this one day . . ." I say to myself, as he orders me to take my coat off and sit quiet for a few moments.

There are works of art in every corner of the studio. Lovely Chinese paintings of mandarins are suspended on a high screen, displaying their Eastern dignity in indescribable shades of salmon-pinks, emerald greens, ivory and velvety-blacks.

At the far end of the screen I am greeted by a comforting happy smile of a fat man painted on silk, full of characteristic Japanese humour. A little Indian figure hangs by the neck on the wall next to a piece of sixteenth-century stained glass, with juicy reds and ultramarine blues. Behind a partially hidden alcove are a collection of Old Masters with a striking portrait of a lady of quality—good enough to be a Frans Hals. This portrait is propped up against a priceless piece of French Bourgoign tapestry. Everywhere, there is something thrilling that captivates my interest. The studio is like a pre-view at Christies, some of the greatest treasures being large red chalk drawings by Brangwyn himself, depicting scenes from the Life of Our Lord. "These must be for the Bruges Exhibition," I reflect, as my eyes catch sight of a weird-looking object hanging on an old oak beam from the ceiling. . . . "A prehistoric animal? . . . no, a piece of putty, or is it just a dirty rag hanging up to dry?"

Brangwyn looks up with a smile. "That's an old cat," he exclaims, getting up from the floor. "It's been like that for years. Rather picturesque, what?"

"I should say so. We have an old dried up rat at home. It was found buried between two oak beams. Father treats it as an *objet d'art* and keeps it in a 'vitrine' next to precious manuscripts, Spanish shawls and a pair of ladies' Louis XV slippers."

"Delightful surroundings, what?" He then looks at his *own* specimen hanging on the beam, and points to it. "You'd think that bloody tail'd pull off! . . . but, no! it'll stick on for donkeys' years yet!"

Roger sees it and begins barking fiercely as Brangwyn listens attentively to a story I tell him about Reckelbus, the Curator of the Bruges Museums, and a cat.

"The cat used to kill all the birds in his garden—until one day he decided to have it destroyed. He called on



a friend asking him if he would do the job, but found him unwilling to end the life of an animal that every one knew in Bruges. A week or so later, the friend saw the cat causing trouble in his own garden, and thereupon changed his mind. He fetched his gun and fired three shots from the window of his sitting-room. All that happened was the animal bolted into the next door neighbour's garden!

"No more news of the cat was heard for several weeks, until, one afternoon—Reckelbus again called on his friend. This time, something really terrible had happened. The cat had returned, and was sitting on the *same tree*, but, with one of its eyes hanging out! . . . 'I can't paint—my life is a nightmare . . .' the curator told his friend."

Brangwyn doesn't know whether to laugh or weep. He throws a glance at the cat hanging on the oak beam and then bursts out into a jovial chuckle gradually leading into a boisterous laugh. "It's something of a tragicomedy . . . sounds rather like a concocted Bruges legend, what?"

I start off on another story from the same source.

"It's about a hen, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Fire ahead."

"The bird had been killed and was having its feathers plucked by the cook. Then, suddenly it sprang up from her knees and bolted down the streets of Bruges in its nudity. It was seen by many of the residents running down by the canal and making for the Memlinc Museum. It was last heard of stepping towards the 'Lac d'Amour'."

"Now, come on. Stop putting these yarns across me!"

"But they're not yarns."

"Well, then, all I can say is, people should be more careful the way they kill their animals. I hate to hear of the poor things suffering. It's awful. I'm sure animals *do* suffer. That poor hen must have suffered terribly, running about Bruges in that condition."

His expression changes. "I wonder how our friend Reckelbus felt about his Sunday lunch going west? Let *me* tell you how once I tried to kill a chicken on a Christmas day. I then lived in the Manresa Studios, Chelsea. The landlord

had an entrance to the yard by the studio and used to keep a lot of fowls. So my friend Dawson and myself having nothing for our Christmas dinner—thought . . . Why not have one of the landlord's fowls? We laid a trail of grain from the yard into the studio. Dawson was to wait behind the studio door with a large German hunting knife and cut off the head of any of the birds which entered the studio. I enticed the bird into the doorway as Dawson made a wild swoop at the chicken—half decapitating the poor bird. I yelled, telling him to finish the job quickly, as the birds were making a devil of a row. But he was in a state of collapse! So, I quickly closed the door and chased the bird all over the studio. It was like a shambles! Blood and feathers all over the shop!

"At last I managed to lay the poor thing out. I quickly plucked it of all its feathers—hurried to the stove and plunged the bird in the pot. But, in my hurry and fear of the landlord turning up—I forgot to take out the entrails. After a bit, what with some oatmeal and other odds and ends which went into the pot—I served it up. But there was a strange smell and flavour about the stew. I suddenly remembered that I hadn't disembowelled the playful bird. That finished our Christmas dinner . . ."

"That's a fine tale."

"*And* a true one!"

"So are mine."

"Maybe. But I actually took part in mine," he says with a mischievous smile; then remembering another story, he proceeds: "You know, there's always a funny side to these things. It reminds me of my old pig Joey. I was very friendly with old Joey, and, strange to say, old Joey was very fond of me. We used to hold little conversations together when I went to make sketches of him. Then came the fatal day when old Joey had to be turned into sausages. Oh, it was a painful business saying good-bye to him. I walked down to the pig-sty and was determined not to show any sort of feeling that things couldn't go on as they were. Do you know? . . . old Joey *knew* the end was near. He was

all agitated and started grunting more than usual. Oh, it nearly broke my heart. I bent over the fence and took a last look at him; and as I was leaving, said: 'Good-bye, Joey. . . . You look fine! . . .' The next morning a fellow came to put an end to his worries."

"I've seen him in many of your paintings. Isn't he in the *Prodigal Son*?"

"Yes, that was Joey. Oh, I've painted him scores of times," he replies shaking his head and with a note of sadness in his voice.

"And what about the picture of two pigs' heads next to a large copper bowl?"

"No, that wasn't him."

"The heads are grinning at you."

"Yes, it's a funny thing. Pigs are always smiling at you, even when they've had their heads cut off, what?"

He then remembers there's a lot of work to be done and points to the strip made for the House of Lords Mural lying on the floor. "What do you think of this? Any good for the monastery? A little on the large size, perhaps? or have they a hall large enough to take it?"

"I think so."

"If not—I suggest they cut it in the centre. There——" he says, marking it out with white chalk.

"You *can't* do that. It breaks up the composition. Please, don't cut it."

"Oh, all right then, if that's how you feel about it." An idea comes into his head. "Now, how about presenting it to the Mayor to put up in the Town Hall? It's a lofty place and might look rather well there . . ."

"An excellent suggestion. It'll brighten up the place; it needs it."

"Well, I leave it to you to see what's best. Now, come along into the other studio and look through the drawings, but—— don't ask any questions about things that have nothing to do with the job on hand. Otherwise we shan't get any work done."

Brangwyn leads the way and walks towards a large table

covered with piles of drawings. He starts fingering them hurriedly as if he wants to do the sorting out in a few minutes, when, judging by the quantity, it should be done with great care and discrimination.

The sun pours through the large studio window and sets off a lovely red chalk drawing—*Christ meets His Mother*. I suggest that this should go to Bruges.

"Which one do you mean?" he demands impatiently, passing on to a study of a man's back. "This one. . . . Yes?" and before giving me time to say anything, lays the drawing on the floor.

"The one of *Christ meeting His Mother*. It's so devout . . . so——"

"I know what you mean. Yes, I tried to put all I could feel into it. But it was never finished, and now, it's been terribly rubbed. I may be able to doctor it up with a few touches of white chalk to bring up the high lights in the face of Our Lady."

"Her face is lovely."

"I shan't spoil it. It only wants a little accentuation of the features here and there. I think I know *just* how to do it." He lays it carefully on the floor and pulls out a still larger drawing. "That's a study for the *Saint Aidan* cartoon I'm giving to the monastery. The drawing can go to Bruges, so that they'll each have a memento of the large mosaic I made for Leeds." He brings out an impressive charcoal study. "Here's something that might appeal to the Belgian people . . . *Refugees Outside a Station* done during the war. Gosh! I remember all the shuffling and panic that took place when I was making my sketch—it was terrible. . . poor souls."

He picks out several powerful sketches which he also adds to the collection and continues :

"Many of these were reproduced in the book published by Turpin in Paris. The reproductions are so cleverly done that no one can tell the difference from the original drawing. The pastels are done in a remarkable way. If you rub your finger over them—the colour actually comes off on your fingers."

He then brings out a vivid water-colour of some gipsies standing by a caravan.

"Do you think they'd like this sort of thing?" he asks modestly.

"I'm sure they would. The Belgians are fond of water-colours."

"That's just what I'm afraid of. They may consider this too sketchy?"

"No. - They'll like it. It's so alive."

"I'm afraid I only consider these as sketches. There're any amount of them they can have." He looks at the picture a moment and smiles. "I painted this a short time ago. Some gipsies came down the village and camped in a field close by. A picturesque lot they were."

"You made an etching of a gipsy woman I like very much."

"I've made so many studies of gipsies in my life; I can't quite place the one you're referring to. Can you tell me what she was like?"

"A rugged sort of woman with pronounced teeth and a cruel look in the eye. The head had tremendous character."

"Oh, I remember the old girl. She was a remarkable creature—always sucking something in her mouth . . . very dirty she was, and had the most amazing stories to tell. Her type is becoming very rare . . . dying out rapidly."

"I once met a gipsy in the train," I interpose. "She started telling my fortune and told me all kinds of extraordinary things which were very true."

"Well, I could read your fortune by looking at your face. That's all the gipsy did. These women knock about the world and acquire a great knowledge. By the way. What did the gipsy tell you that was so good?"

A pause follows as I try to remember. "Well, come on! Surely you haven't forgotten what the woman told you?"

"She said I was of an artistic temperament."

"That's not very difficult to read in your face. Did she want to borrow any money or get you to buy something?"

"She was a rich woman. Her hands were covered in diamonds."

"Then she may have been the dangerous type. It's a good thing you managed to get away from her. There's no telling what her little game might have been. Besides, I've always had a dislike for women who plaster their hands with a lot of rings. It's ugly and bad taste, and knocks the hand all out of shape." Then he asks shrewdly: "Do you think they were genuine?"

"I believe so."

"Well, I can't say I've ever been very fascinated by flashy diamonds and rubies."

"Have you ever worn any rings?"

"Sometimes. But they got in the way when I was working, so I took them off. The right thing for a man to wear (that is, if he feels like going in for rings) is a simple austere thing, like the Roman and Greek intaglios. The Italians during the Renaissance had some fine rings. I always think there's nothing finer than to see the Pope with his enormous soup-plate. It's all right for the Pope to wear it, but these things in ordinary life are a damned nuisance."

"Like the one I wore at the monastery?"

"Yes. It sounds a grand affair. You'd better bring it over one afternoon."

Brangwyn fetches a collection of water-colours and begins to spread them out in the studio. He asks me to take a walk round and pick out those that might be suitable for our purpose. These works are so alive and colourful that one feels transported by them.

"That's *Poplar Trees in Picardy*," he calls out. "And an old *Bridge at Subbiano* . . . *Place Van Eyck, Bruges* . . . *The Bridge of Sighs* . . . *People making love in Bruges* . . . Then we come to *that one*—" pointing to an enormous building. "This is the *Kasba, Tangier* . . . and the reddish looking one of people walking is *A Procession at Furnes* . . . a fine sight that you ought to try to see if you get the opportunity."

He goes through some of the remaining ones. "The *River Lot, Saint Cirque* . . . *Hurstmouceux* that's in Sussex . . . *The Pont Neuf, Paris* . . . *Farm in Sussex* . . . *Ruins at Messina* . . . *Unloading at London Bridge* . . . and the one in

the far corner is *Figures on the Nile*—a very early work of mine, do you like it ? ”

“ Very much. Everything seems to be centred round that mysterious little red light on the boat. It makes you wonder what’s going on there—with all those people half-naked, standing on the deck, and others, paddling in a greeny-blue water towards the shore. Would you be able to paint pictures like this now, from your head ? ”

“ Yes, yes, because I’ve trained my imagination. The sketchbook is the thing. Always carry this with you, and make notes of anything you see that is interesting. You’ll find that after a time scenes remain imprinted in your memory. People have come to me and said . . . ‘ I don’t understand how you can memorise a drawing of a farmer plucking a fowl.’ Well, that’s because I’ve drawn hundreds of farmers plucking fowls, and each time something has been stored up in my mind.”

“ So you could paint a building in Venice if you wanted to ? ”

“ Venice——” he shouts out. “ I can bring back scenes in Cahors . . . Florence . . . and Africa. I could go into my studio this very moment and knock up a few ‘ barges on the Rialto’. In fact, I do these things—only yesterday, I painted a sketch of some women hanging up their washing in a quaint little street in Spain.”

“ It’s wonderful to be able to travel wherever you like.”

“ Yes, one gets a lot of fun out of it.”

I point to a small oil sketch of an Italian scene and ask if this was done in the studio. Brangwyn picks it up and rubs a duster over it.

“ No. I painted it in Taormina—and, as a matter of fact, thought of giving it to Bruges. But, I may want to use it for making a larger painting. It’s a fine subject, what ? ”

“ A lovely colour.”

“ Ah yes, you get those rich blues out there.”

He picks up another small picture—rather dark, but of a delicate tone, and full of vigour. “ You can have this for your collection. It’s a Persian market.”

"For Bruges?" I inquire.

"No, for yourself. You can take that old Florentine carved frame over there and those small sketches on the table. The frame is good, but the sketches aren't up to much. They're interesting as first impressions made for some of my works. One or two of them may be all right, but *don't* go through them now. I want to get on with this job. We seem to be sorting the stuff out somehow, but it's a big building and I'm afraid we shan't find enough works to fill it, what?"

Pointing to a collection of dry-points he asks: "How about giving them this set of prints I made to illustrate *l'Ombre de la Croix* by the Frères Tharaud?"

Then he shows me a few of the prints which represent scenes from the synagogue. Some of them are only three-quarters of an inch square and give the impression of being huge etchings. We find in the same folio some of his pen and ink drawings of circus life.

He pulls one out and says: "I've always been very sympathetic with the circus lot," and asks: "Did you ever meet any famous clowns abroad?"

"Yes. I saw Grock in Brussels."

"Ah. He was one of the finest clowns that ever lived . . . a master at the job was old Grock. Your father must have known him in Paris."

"Yes. He saw him at the 'Cirque Medrano' where he was making his *début*. Grock used to have the whole audience laughing the moment he walked on the stage; and when he threw out his famous remark: '*sans blague*' they cried with laughter."

"That was Grock, right enough. It's not every clown who had this gift. . . . No—— Something born in you that you can't learn . . . something inexplicable that has the power of sending off a whole audience into shrieks of laughter. Old Grock was a true artist who did things without any effort—like the painter who knocks off a sketch in one sitting—and when you look at it you wonder how on earth he's done it! Yes, these are gifts that are only accorded to a

few—and you usually find that those who've been picked—don't know anything about it."

"Is it genius?"

"If you like to call it so. You see—there are many clever people in the world, but, cleverness is *nothing* if there's no feeling. This applies to Art . . . Music . . . Literature, and every damn thing under the sun that moves you in life. It doesn't matter *what* you do? If you don't *feel* the thing—it's better to leave it alone. Now, I don't call myself a musician. But, whenever I hear a piece of music—it doesn't matter what it is . . . Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven . . . there's always an inexplicable 'something' that immediately tells me whether the fellow's an artist. Well, Grock had that 'something' about him, and that's why *he* out of hundreds—could hold a whole audience spellbound. . . ."

A ray of sunlight catches his eyes as he continues: "Now, you get many fellows to-day in the circus who think they're funny—but they just bore you to tears . . . poor souls."

"I met someone who knew Grock in private life. He said he was a very unhappy man; no one took him seriously."

"That's the unfortunate thing about a clown's life. People think that if a fellow makes one laugh he must be a damn fool. But, in my opinion, a fellow who can tear one away from life's worries is doing a hell of a lot of good in the world! A funny world we live in? It seems made up of people who give and people who receive, what?"

"But if one is happy doing the thing?"

"That's how *I* see it. If a person is pleased—it is sufficient payment for me."

"A fine philosophy, Mr. Brangwyn."

"It's mine and always has been. You don't want to do something with the idea of getting something back—it spoils everything. If a fellow gives you a pat on the back . . . all well and good. If he doesn't, don't trouble, you weren't expecting it. At least, you shouldn't have been, what?"

"We very often expect it, I'm afraid."

"Well, that's why you've got to adjust your principles."

Don't ever do a thing with *that* thought at the back of your mind. It's hopeless!"

Lighting a cigarette he takes two hasty puffs and sends the smoke out at intervals from each corner of the mouth. "When I was young, circuses were great fun. I remember seeing the harlequins and columbines going about with strings of sausages round their necks. Some of the fellows would pull them off—cook 'em and stick them in the harlequins' mouths."

"A good subject for a painting."

"Oh, the circus is full of material for the artist. Take some of the clowns in daylight. . . . a painful article they are, but good stuff for a picture."

He knocks the ash from his cigarette into the palm of his hand and takes it over to the window where he leans out for a few moments and remains silent. Then walking back with renewed energy for work he asks me to follow him upstairs into the studio where he has spread out further drawings, also some etchings, woodcuts and lithographs.

"You go first, Belleruche, and don't . . ." He sees me looking at a sketch of a man going up a ladder. "Now, what are you doing? Come on! Come on! and leave things alone, there's a lot of work to be done."

"But, Mr. Brangwyn, it's . . ."

"Leave it alone, will you!"

He picks up the sketch and sticks it on a chair. "Now, what can you see in that studio-knock-up—it's not even finished. . . . Nothing!" and puts it back on the ground.

"It's the man's back—the way he's going up the ladder . . . he might slip at any moment . . . it's so realistic—and that beautiful sea. . . . that indescribable blue—"

"It might have been a good thing if I'd spent another morning's work on it. But, in this condition. . . . No!"

"A sketch often appeals to me more than a finished work."

"Well, if the picture's any good to you—Take it!"

"But I can't do that."

"Yes, you have it if you like it. Only for goodness sake let's get upstairs and look out the stuff for Bruges."

"You won't think I've been cadging if I take the picture, will you?"

"Of course not. I'm only too glad you like it. If I tell a fellow a picture is a fine thing, and he gives it to me—Well, that's not cadging, is it?"

"No. Not when *you* say it."

"Well, it's the same thing," he says with a smile, and asks me to take care as we pass into a small room. "I've got some rare pieces of Oriental pottery in here and I'm giving them to the South Kensington and other museums. If you're interested in this sort of thing I can let you have a few odd pieces which have had chips out and are no use from a collector's point of view. To an artist, it makes no difference."

"None at all."

"Right. You shall have them. Now, come along, and take care as you walk down here. . . ." He points to a gorgeous bowl, and asks: "What about this for colour . . . it's Korean."

"Superb."

"Well, come on," he calls out, leading the way up the stairs. "One day, I'll ask you to come and look at my collection of pots before I send them away. The things I've exchanged for a beautiful old pot—I'll tell you about this some time. Pots have cost me collections of Old Master drawings—some of my best paintings, and all kinds of rare pieces of furniture."

He holds firmly to the banisters of the stairs and meets Mrs. Peacock half-way.

"Now, one of us must go back," he tells her. "We can't cross on the stairs."

Lizzie goes back, and Brangwyn shoots up the final three steps, calling out from the top: "Come along——"

As we walk down a narrow passage, he exclaims: "Yes, pots have always been my weakness."

At the end of the passage, glittering in the sun, I notice a yellow Louis XV *corsage* resting on a table. "I have a lot of these," he says, leading me into a small room for a few moments, before going into the studio next door.

A large collection of antique costumes and priceless brocades are lying in a heap on the floor. The room is packed with things of this kind, but I don't have long to look at them.

In the studio, there is also much to attract my attention. I ask Brangwyn to allow me a few minutes before we start work. He shakes his head understandingly and takes me round for a short conducted tour.

"This bowl——" pointing to a pale blue and white bowl over a china-cabinet "is Persian . . . very rare."

"It must have great value?"

"Yes, but that means nothing to an artist. It's a very beautiful piece. I know it cost me two hundred quid, but I never look at works of art in this way. Value . . . money . . . damn it!—that's the curse of all the trouble to-day. If a pot is a fine thing, it's a fine thing, and there the matter ends."

"What's the tiny pot next to it?"

"Rather a nice colour. It came from the 'Handicrafts Shop' round the corner. The reason I stick it there is to see the light catching on it after lunch."

Brangwyn then calls me away from the china-cabinet and takes me to the large window in the studio. "Now, I'll show you the finest work of art I've got," and points to the magnificent view of the Downs. "I can sit by this window for hours. The view is most inspiring and it is always different. It seems to fit into all one's various moods. I watch the clouds passing over the Downs . . . and if *you* want to see something really fine—come over and sit here on a stormy day. It's a glorious sight . . . something that would have thrilled Mantegna when he was painting his *Crucifixion*. It's something you've never seen in your life that stormy day is!"

He returns to the china-cabinets and points out pieces of Chinese, Persian, Japanese, and other Oriental potteries. I notice a small clay figure of a woman's torso standing next to a still smaller Greek head.

"Who is the torso by, Mr. Brangwyn?"

"Rodin. I have other ones . . . larger works, and many

of his sketches. I knew him well. One day, my friend Lanteri called on him and spotted a whole collection of small clay figures (fragments of torsos, arms, heads, and little groups that were going to the dust heap). I asked Rodin to let us have these. He said, 'Yes.' Later, I had some of them made into plaster."

He picks up one of these small heads and offers it to me. "I'll make you a present of this. It's signed underneath—Look! . . . 'A. RODIN' . . . written in pencil."

Thrilled with the present, I take it from him and pack it up carefully in my case. "I love this," I exclaim, "particularly the little flattened-out nose. Do you think Rodin did this on purpose?"

"Very likely so."

He draws my attention to a large portfolio full of his finest engravings. Two or three of his well-known "Bridges" are lying on the top. The first one I recognise is the *Bridge of Mostar*. I begin to pull some of them out. *The Bridge of Sighs* . . . *Le Pont Marie* . . . *Les Haleurs* . . . *The Puddlers* . . . *The Mill at Dixmude* and other well-known prints in superb condition—including that very rare one: *The Monument*.

Brangwyn, who until this moment has been looking on with a smile, now tells me: "These prints are from my own collection. Some of the finest pulls that were taken . . . many rare states among them. I've decided to let Bruges have the lot. You see, I've no one to leave them to when I kick the bucket, and it'd be nice to know they had gone to Bruges."

"I understand your feelings. But the Bruges people are very fortunate."

"Yes, but you mustn't forget one thing. In nine cases out of ten, my etchings that have gone to museums have been put into folios. *These* prints I'm giving them will be framed and hung up permanently so that the public may see them."

"That's true."

"So they might as well have something good to look at, what?"

He fetches three other portfolios and puts them next to the etchings. "I won't open these now. They're full of small etchings, woodcuts, and lithographs. Over there——" he says, pointing to another table, "I've put aside a good set of my large lithographs and the recently completed *Stations of the Cross*. I'm giving the set printed on wood to the monastery. But, you'll have to tell the Abbot they mustn't be put in the Chapter Room if the place is at all damp. They could always put some heating in the room, but that might cost them a lot, and I wouldn't like that."

"They have heating there."

"Oh, that's fine."

Picking up a small portfolio he tells me it contains sketches he has designed for furniture which could be made in plain oak for the Hotel Arents. He explains with great detail the designs he has drawn for chairs, tables, seats, and pedestals. Everything is made clear and drawn to scale. He asks me to take the portfolio back with me so I can pack it in my luggage, and then he addresses me with authority :

"I want you to come over in a couple of days so that we can go through some more pictures and discuss further arrangements for the exhibition."

"The Museum, you mean."

Smiling gently, he replies : "Yes, I know. But, I don't like to say this until the thing has actually taken place. It might bring us bad luck."

"I don't think so. A letter arrived from Sir Paul Lambotte two days ago in which he says : '*C'est comme un beau rêve.*'"

"What's that—something about a dream?"

"Yes. . . ."

"Well, there you are. It may only be a dream."

"It's a dream for both you *and* Belgium. Then it must come true."

"Anyway, let's forget about it for the time being. How about a little stroll in the garden? After this, you'd better get home and answer some of those letters. Have you answered that one to Lambotte?"

"I was going to do so to-night."

"Well, you might tell him the dream is mine."

"Don't say that, Mr. Brangwyn. You're depreciating the importance of your gift."

"It's silly to talk like that. I know Lambotte well enough to say these things."

"But Lambotte is not alone."

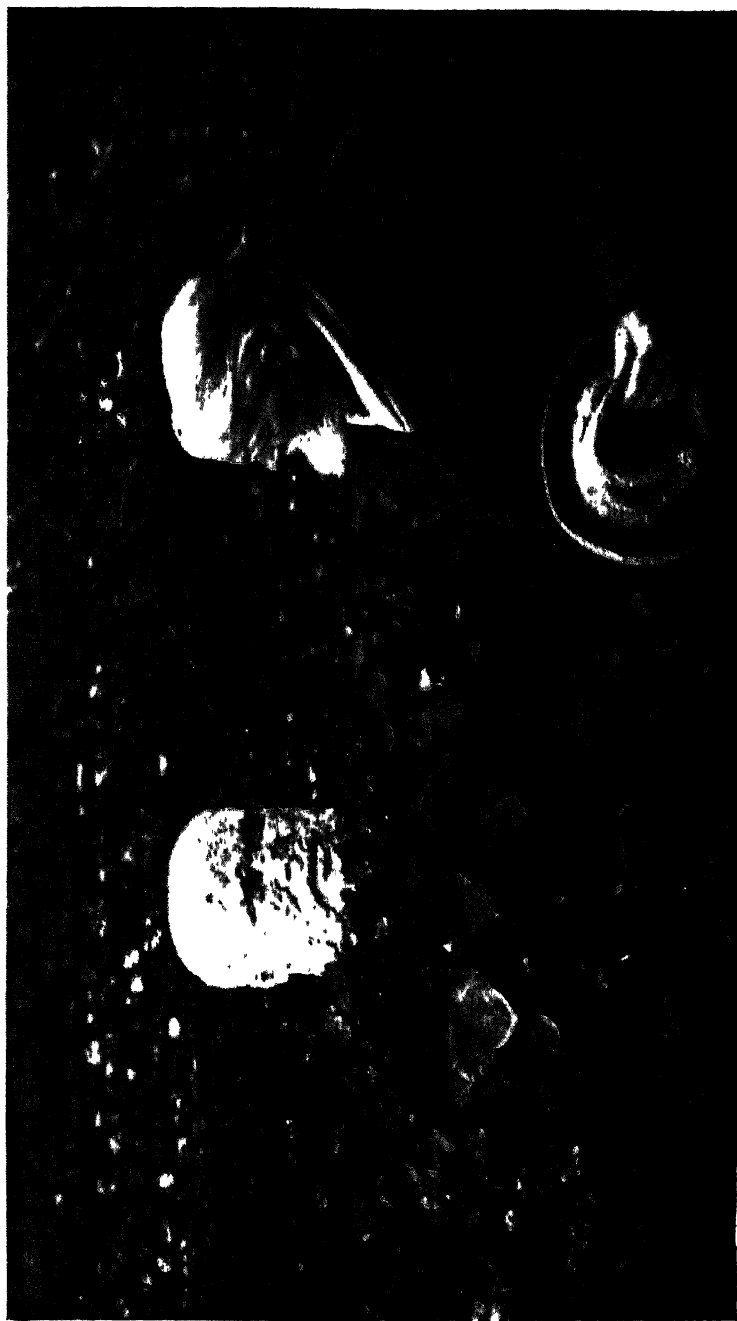
"Perhaps you're right. Well, come along into the garden and see if the tomatoes have grown any larger. By the way, that reminds me. You might ask the Abbot when you next go to the monastery if he knows where I can get some seeds of the real old type of large tomatoes that used to be grown in Bruges. I'd like to grow some over here. If he doesn't know anything about them, go and see some of the old Bruges farmers." An idea strikes him as we get to the door. "I know . . ." he exclaims. "The Mayor is the man who'll tell us . . . ask *him*."

He collects his hat and walking stick and leads the way into the garden. "Let's go and have a look at the head of old Socrates. I'm told his face is covered with ivy."

There is very little of the head to be seen. Pulling out a pair of scissors from his waistcoat pocket he begins to trim the ivy, making a lovely beard appear, and revealing the shape of that splendid forehead so full of wisdom.

"It's a good bust of the period," he bursts out. "There's no doubt it being Socrates. The nice thing to know is that the fellow who sculpted this head must have been one of his contemporaries . . . but I'm afraid the weather is eating the stone away. I shouldn't have left it out of doors—but where can I put it? The house is full of stuff, what? It was given to me by Fradeletto of Venice who had it in his garden where it had been for years. It came from Spoleto. No doubt it was in the palace of the Emperor Diocletian. Years ago, it was a common thing for the ships trading with the Dalmatian coast to





PAYING HIS RESPECTS TO SOCRATES.

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use these broken marbles for ballast and they sold the stuff to the Venetian lime borers. Lots of really fine stuff must have been so cooked up . . . lost for ever. Awful it is."

"It looks fine there."

"That's why I don't like to shift it," he ejaculates, passing his hand over the smooth white marble. "Otherwise, you could have it for your collection."

"But it seems as if it were made for your garden."

"Yes, I suppose it does. We'll give it another trial and see how it survives the winter."

I then remind Brangwyn about the faun he promised me, and ask if I may take it home. He gives me one of his searching looks and remains silent for a few moments.

"But it'd be a shame to take it away. It looks even better than old Socrates," he replies coldly.

"Except that it won't survive another winter."

"And why won't it?" still more coldly.

"Because it's wood."

"My dear sir! That wood has got as hard as iron. If it were to perish, it would have done so ages ago. Anyway, let's go and see the old fellow."

As we proceed along—all kinds of weird looking plants meet our eyes. Brangwyn tells me these have served as material for his House of Lords Murals and that some of them are very rare. "Plants have always captured my fancy," he says, smiling. "I grab hold of any I can lay my hands on and have swopped some of my pictures for certain choice specimens. Oh yes, I've always fallen for the plant world. It's so full of variety and interest. It is my chief joy drawing plants."

Twisting his moustache into tiny curls and straightening them out again he inspects the large carved figure of a faun: a likeable, dignified, and yet horrid-looking creature buried in an alcove surrounded by ivy and cobwebs.

"Hullo, old chap!" he bursts out. "It's high time we came to call on you, what?" Then turning in my direction and pulling away twisted branches of ivy: "Isn't he fine—Look at him! A piece of genuine Renaissance carving."

The Master grins at the faun, and the faun grins back.

"It's terribly alive, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Speaking to you, what? Once you've had a look at the fellow you can't get away from his satirical grin. An ugly bit of goods he is, and yet I've grown to like him. I'd be sorry to see him go."

"But you said I could have him?"

"Yes, yes, but not now."

He cuts away more ivy and clears the chest which is curiously pierced by a large hole circled with metal. The legs are covered by little tufts of hair curling in all directions.

"How does he look now?" he exclaims with the joy of someone making a discovery.

"Fine. May I take him away?"

He gives me another of his uncomfortable looks and replies acidly: "I thought we'd already discussed this——"

"I'm sorry. I was forgetting."

"Oh, well, perhaps you'd better take it. I *did* say you could have it." He lifts the carving off the nail and lays it on the lawn with its face looking heavenwards. "What a picture he looks! I'd give my boots to paint it! And, to think I've brought him back all the way from Messina!"

"I never knew that."

"Yes. He was one of the victims of the terrible earthquake. I carried him on my back." He points to slight remains of gold leaf on the faun and says: "The fellow was gilt all over when I first had him, but the worms had got hold of him and I left him out of doors for a cure. He was cured all right, but all the gold disappeared."

As we sit down on the wooden seat Mrs. Peacock comes to pick a few flowers. Seeing us, she holds a magnificent bloom in the air. Brangwyn is moved by the rich colouring and exclaims:

"It makes my mouth water to see that. Look at the light shining behind the petals—the colour of the thing is superb. But how can one paint it? . . . No one can tell us what the colour is? At one moment it's scarlet, another, crimson-lake,



"THE FAUN."

and damn it, before you know where you are—it's every red under the sun . . . a blazing sunset."

He laughs ironically as he thinks of certain artists who paint flowers. "They think it's easy, *when* . . . to do it well . . . it's dashed difficult." Then pointing to the flower he shouts out: "Bring that rose into the dining room—take away the green foliage, and the red will probably become a dark purple. Colour . . . COLOUR? . . . no one knows anything about it. Everything is a question of contrast and harmony. Nature is all harmony, and so it should be in your painting. Paint as brightly as you like . . . put a violent red next to a veronese green, or an emerald one if you like—but make your colours harmonise, and then you can do what you like."

"But what do you mean by when it harmonises?"

"Everything helping to make a pattern, blending together like a fine piece of tapestry or carpet. It's something you feel."

"And if you don't?"

"Then you'll never be a colourist. You'll find out that after a time it will come as natural to you as sticking a penny stamp on an envelope. If it doesn't . . . well, perhaps you were not made to be a colourist."

Brangwyn leads me to a flower-bed and continues the talk: "You see those roses over there. Well, if I wanted to paint them, my first thought would be the *flower* and not the *sketch*. A great many artists think of the sketch first, and say to themselves . . . 'I'm going to turn out a Fantin, Chardin or Manet.' Damn it, why not be ourselves for a change?" Pausing a moment. "Even if I've thought of Rubens or Mantegna when doing a painting, I've always been so moved by the thing in front of me—NATURE—that I've never been able to see it like these artists, much as one would like to. . . ."

He then points to some multi-coloured nasturtiums creeping all round the stone vase. "Take that splash of colour. Yes, colour first of all—WHAT COLOUR—it's impossible to tell. Well, I want to make a picture. I begin to paint the flowers and concentrate on the colour—experimenting with

all sorts of contrasts to see what background is going to bring up the brilliance of the nasturtiums. Sometimes I mess around with hundreds of schemes until SUDDENLY my nasturtiums come to life. It's often something accidental that takes place like the musician playing on the keys. Some note is suddenly struck which makes a harmony of the whole, something you can't explain. Then I look at the fascinating form and shape of the plant. The way it hangs all over the vase. "I try to accentuate one or two flowers so as to give the impression my painting is a bunch of nasturtiums." He lights a cigarette and inhales the first whiff with delight as he continues: "A rose is always a rose . . . a dahlia always a dahlia, and has been for untold years. Each artist paints them as *he* sees them. Colour moves some—drawing, others. But it's always good to mix a bit of both if you want to convey a true impression of nature. What *you* accentuate, the other man eliminates and so on. Each one has his own particular vision. That's the essence of Art in my opinion."

"Please go on, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Well, it's only *my* way of looking at things. You want to get your father on the subject. He's painted many flowers in his day."

"I have already discussed the subject with him."

"And what does *he* say?"

"His views are very similar to yours. Except that he would prefer painting *one* rose to several."

"Well, there's nothing finer than a single rose in a glass bowl. I've also enjoyed simplicity in my flower pictures. It's only when I've been working on decorative stuff that I've stuck many flowers together, with pots, game, and a lot of brass plates, etcetera. But when I do what the French call *Le Morceau* my still-lives have always had very few things in them . . . a couple of onions, an old jar and an apple. I'll show you some of these one day." He thinks for a moment. "That reminds me, I might look out some of these for Bruges. There's one I can bring back to my memory this moment. I have it upstairs—a bunch of bananas with a few

plums thrown over a pale blue tablecloth. I'll get it out this evening."

"But I like your crowded ones also."

"Yes, but they should be looked at in a different light. In all humility, without wishing in any way to compare myself to Rubens, I feel I have somewhat the same outlook, the same way of seeing things, grouping things, etc. When Rubens arranged his still-life pictures, he kind of put together the things that I should have put together . . . a lot of fruit . . . vegetables, melons and pumpkins, cats and dogs. No doubt he's had a great influence on me and many others. I should have loved to have been one of his humble assistants working at bits of stuff for him like our old friend Jordaens. Then you get Chardin who is the other version: the 'single rose business.' I must say I've always liked both ideas."

Brangwyn walks away from the flowers and throws a hasty glance at my emerald green Harris tweed suit which seems greener than ever in the sun.

"Rather a saucy-looking affair, isn't it?" he says with one of his mischievous expressions.

"It is rather," I concede.

Giving my suit a somewhat troubled look, I tell him of an incident that happened in the village a few moments before my arrival. "I met someone at the paper shop who said all I needed was a little yellow flower in the button hole to give the necessary note. I didn't know how to take it, and realised for the first time that my suit *was* rather loud. Do you think it is?"

He handles the material. "No, no, no, and I don't think he meant to say anything unkind. In fact, I'm cock sure he didn't. He was trying to make you see that he liked it. By the way, it's damned good material," he concludes, letting go of the cloth.

"No better than yours, Mr. Brangwyn."

"Well, mine's getting old. It's been good in its day. Yours must have cost a bob or two?"

"Only the usual price."

"That depends what you mean by the usual price. When

I was your age, the usual price might have meant a couple of sketches of Venice, or a portrait of the tailor and his family or dog. Oh, I used to be hot stuff at that sort of game ! ”

“ Were you always the winner ? ”

“ Not always. But you get a great deal of fun in making a swop with someone. The trouble is you sometimes make a swop for something you don’t really want. Then the trouble begins.”

He brings the conversation back to clothes and asks me the address of my tailor saying he would like to get a suit made in the same tweed. “ I don’t say I’d choose the same colour,” he says, smiling whimsically. “ But it’s the cloth I like.”

“ Then, you *don’t* like the colour ? ”

“ Oh, shut up ! I told you I did ! I could wear that colour when I was your age, but now I must seek tones that are a little more discreet.”

“ I see.”

“ Well, it’s about time you *did* see ! By the way. It’s funny how certain people have a passion for collecting souvenirs. A woman who came to see me the other day stared at my trousers. I felt embarrassed. They were an old pair I used for knocking about the studio with a large hole in the right knee fastened up with a safety pin to keep out the draught. ‘ My trousers . . . ’ I thought to myself. ‘ What the hell does the woman want my trousers for ? ’ Then she said she liked the cloth so I replied : ‘ All right, and you can let me have yours in exchange.’ Silence followed. Perhaps the good lady hadn’t got any. However, I never carried the subject any further and took her for a stroll round my garden. Looking at her I realised she didn’t quite fit into my landscape. A painful article she was, with a face plastered in rouge, a slash of ugly red across the lips and a pair of legs like broomsticks. Oh dear me—— Why do they do it ? ”

“ I can’t think.”

“ Well, nor can I, nor do I want to. I’d never paint a woman in that get-up—never ! Look at nature . . . the roses we were talking about. What is so exquisite about

those roses? HARMONY. Why do people say a woman's lips are like a rose bud: Because they *were* before they'd been disfigured with lipstick. It's a pretty awful state of affairs, what? The cinema's largely to blame."

"I'm sure that's why father hasn't painted any portraits recently. He always talks of harmony."

"Yes, harmony. And you don't get it when looking at the average woman to-day. That's why it's such a joy when you see a 'Madonna-like Woman.' But they're very rare, that sort of women, nowadays."

Pointing to a corner of the garden he exclaims: "I'd like to paint that bit. It's slightly reminiscent of Corot." His eyes seem all wrapped up in the landscape and his entire expression lightens up with interest. The sun catches his attention and he remains speechless for a few seconds. Then he begins to point out the characteristics that fascinate him about the landscape.

"It's the soft breeze shaking those top leaves from the trees. I can only see Corot painting that. The fellow knew how to handle this movement in his pictures. That's what makes his work so beautiful. A lightness that is typical of the Master. Constable, Turner, and a few others have done it over here—but, in general, our English landscape artist paints a tree in one mood, without much life. A tree is always moving, not a dead thing like so many people are apt to imagine it."

"I have a painting attributed to Corot which I picked up abroad for fifty francs."

He throws his head back with a sudden jerk and raps out: "What do you mean by attributed? It's either a Corot or it isn't! No one ever succeeded in approaching Corot. They had a lot of dashed fine artists at his time who painted landscapes, but these weren't treated like Corot would have done. The same spirit, yes, but not his way of handling it. I'm speaking of Corot at his best, mind you."

Brangwyn then asks me casually to bring over the picture for his inspection and tells me about a genuine Corot he could have bought for a small sum of money. "It was many

years ago," he begins softly. "I saw 'my Corot' in a pastry shop near Notting Hill Gate. I used to pass the place on my way to work at William Morris's shop in Oxford Street. The owner was an artist in pastry and I heard long afterwards was a friend of all the French artists at that time, Corot, Degas, Renoir, etc., etc. I *did* hear that he was one of the many Frenchmen who fled at the time of the 'Commune' like Legros, Dalou, and others. I used to study at his window; in fact one might say that all one's training was got in this way. A good feed of French Art followed up with the Gothic-cum-Morris decorative art in the day—a good mixture.

"He was a bit of an artist in his line and stuck works by Degas, Sisley, Manet, and Corot in his window with a few of his wonderful cakes . . . real masterpieces. The Corot I am speaking to you about was the show piece in the window one day. A large work; one of his finest. It was a grand piece! I can still see it before me."

He brings out a pencil and begins to sketch the picture on the back of an old envelope. "Trees . . . a walk between willows with men drawing a net with fish in the early morning mist. You would have gone raving mad over this painting. Upon my soul . . . it was a knock-out!"

"Why didn't you buy it?"

"Buy it? I was earning about ten or twelve shillings a week. It was marked on a ticket a hundred quid, but it was always there. One has wondered what became of it. In those days, Corot's paintings were more or less unsaleable, except in Scotland where Cotier the dealer was selling them."

"Was this pastry shop known to connoisseurs?"

"No, it was right out of the way. Occasionally, Lanteri and Legros used to go there and no doubt take their friends."

Brangwyn then walks up to the seat close to the kitchen garden and sits down, throwing his legs up on the wooden planks and covering his face with his panama. He asks me to find room in the corner.

"Are you all right?" he calls out in a somewhat muffled voice, and begins to speak of pictures he has had and exchanged for other things.

"This 'swopping business' is a dangerous habit," he sings out from his comfortable position. "Damned dangerous, it is! Don't *you* ever fall for it. I've been a victim of it all my life and have often regretted it. I could write a book on all my adventures connected with swopping."

"Why is it dangerous?"

"Because the very fact you want something from another fellow immediately makes him realise he's got something good . . . even if he hasn't. You may want something that'll help you with a picture you're working on—a spurious Old Master of a nobleman with a fine plumed hat you'd like to copy—and you make a swop. The fellow becomes suspicious and thinks you're going to swindle him. He immediately puts up the value of his work. You tell him he can have this and that, and before you know where you are, you're offering a sketch by Gainsborough, a drawing by Rubens, and stacks of your own work, all for a ruddy pot that turns out to be a fake.

"Oh, you don't want to embark on that game. It gets hold of you and you end up by losing your head and regretting you'd ever met the fellow, besides the awful waste of time!"

Taking off his panama, he lays it on the seat, lights a cigarette and looks at me with a smile. "I don't think I've ever benefited by swops. I once gave away a whole collection of Old Master drawings for a set of Piranesi etchings—his *Prisons*—the best things he ever did. But what are a set of etchings in exchange for drawings by Raphael, Titian, Corregio, Rubens, Boucher and other Old Masters? It doesn't bear looking back upon. And the joke of this little deal was that the man who had the Piranesis asked me to let him show the drawings to his client and I never saw the drawings or Piranesi etchings again. . . ."

Brangwyn then swings his legs to the ground, sits up suddenly on the seat and hits his walking stick three times on the stone path. "And I kick myself for having swopped the original sketch by Géricault for his famous picture the *Raft*."

"A Géricault?"

"Yes, yes, a Géricault. The original sketch in oil for that

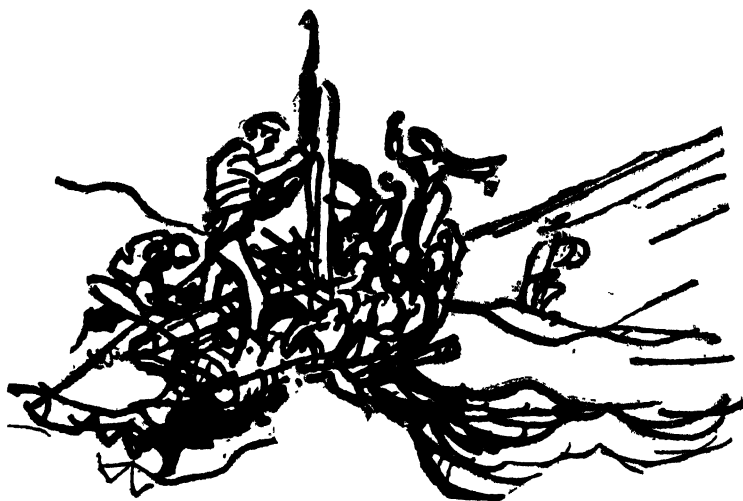
celebrated picture the *Raft*," he repeats, hitting his stick again on the ground and catching it between two flag-stones. "Damn it, I'll bust this if I'm not careful!" He pulls it away with vigour and picks up a tiny weed. Smiling, he says: "It's been quite useful, what?"

I tell him I know of a painting by Géricault: A bearded man rather like an Apostle. His face lights up as he exclaims: "That's probably a study for one of the figures in the *Raft*. Lots of these have been found. Have you got the picture?" he demands excitedly.

"No, not yet. It belongs to a friend of mine in Brussels who said he'd give it to me."

"*You* get it!" he exclaims. "I'll make you a handsome swop for it. You can have one of my pictures in the studio—or if you prefer it I might find you a decent Old Master. Write to your friend to-night. Géricault is a great artist, a fellow who would have done wonders had he lived long enough. From your description, this head of a bearded man sounds like the real thing—Get it!"

Then cursing himself for letting the old habit get hold of him again, he says: "I can't get away from it, I'm sorry. Well, since we're at it again, let me tell you of another





BRANGWYN AIRS HIS VIEWS ON SWOPPING.

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occasion when I let myself in for a nasty fall. I was swopping as usual. This time my wife had warned me against it. A fellow had a few Persian pots I wanted for my collection, and do you know what I did? I exchanged all the magnificent furniture of my dining-room for them . . . settees, chairs, tables, buffets, and all sorts of lovely pieces. . . . All, for a few broken pots, many of which were unworthy of my collection. My poor wife wept for days about it, and yet, nothing would have stopped my passion of the moment—except old age . . . ‘the frozen hand of age has killed the ardour of youth,’ as Petrarch says.”

“But I love making swops with you, Mr. Brangwyn.”

“Ah, that may be because I’ve been the loser again,” he replies, chuckling. “It’s different now. I want to find a home for the stuff.” Then pointing his fingers in my direction, “We haven’t really got going yet. Get hold of that Géricault, and you’ll see——”

“I’ll write to-night. The picture is in Brussels.”

“*Not* in Bruges?” he inquires gently lowering his eyebrows.

“No. Although I know a Baron there who has some interesting pieces. But I don’t think he would make any swops. He has a lovely little chapel in his house full of carved figures of Saints.”

“Oh, he’s got a chapel has he? I always used to have a small chapel in my house for priests who came and stayed with me. That Spanish altar-piece with painted figures I have upstairs came from my chapel in my London house—‘Temple Lodge.’ It was very sad when the place had to be broken up.”

He says he would like to meet the Baron and asks whether he knows many of the Bruges artists. I tell him that he knows most of them and has some interesting works by our English sculptor Gilbert who lived in Bruges.

“Well, that’s most interesting news,” he exclaims. “I’ve always wanted to find out a few things about old Gilbert’s life in Bruges. So the Baron knew him, what?”

“I’m not certain about knowing him personally. He has several of his works.”

"I'd like to hear more about him. Poor old Gilbert. I felt rather ashamed of myself for not calling on him when I was in Bruges. He was living there in bitterness . . . we'd practically turned him out of this country. I never called on him because I didn't want to remind him of the unpleasant things that'd been done to him over here. I was afraid of hurting his feelings," he ends softly.

"Do you admire his work?"

"Gilbert at his best, yes. He's one of our finest artists, ranks with Stevens, but at times he was inclined to over embellish. He would have been a great silversmith—in fact, he was one."

"The Baron has most of his sketch-books. I saw the original design he made for the statue of 'Eros.' It's no bigger than a postage stamp."

"That's interesting. You should ask the Baron to let you exhibit some of his works in Bruges at the time of my exhibition."

"It's an idea. But I'd rather not detract from the interest in your show."

"Oh, you're always seeing things in some particular light, Belleruche! I don't see how a Gilbert exhibition would detract in any way from my exhibition. On the contrary, it would draw great crowds of people to Bruges, far greater than my show would."

"*You* may think so, Mr. Brangwyn."

"I certainly do. Besides, I'd rather like to be exhibiting in the company of Gilbert. It'd be a nice opportunity of making up (on my part) for all the injustices we did to him over here. See what you can do about it."

"I'll discuss it with the Mayor."

"That's an idea. By the way. Did the Mayor know him?"

"Yes. He told me Gilbert was a real character. He said he wept terribly at the graveside of his mother."

"So I've heard. Poor old Gilbert. He was very highly strung and sensitive—the loss of his mother must have affected him no end. He was devoted to her and made a remarkable oration at her graveside. The bust he made of her is a grand

work, what? Gilbert had a gift for speaking in public and was also a good musician. He wrote a good deal of poetry and had many gifts. But I fear he wasted a lot of his time re-doing and re-doing his work. He was never satisfied."

For a few moments Brangwyn remains silent. The sun appears from behind heavy clouds and catches his face, throwing dark shadows over his eyes. He now speaks with a somewhat disturbed voice: "I'm afraid Gilbert isn't the only one to have wasted his time. It's so easy for all of us to follow the line of least resistance . . . seeking the—what we believe—comforting things of life . . . and are they?" he demands, throwing me one of his searching looks. "No, sir! I've come to the conclusion that the only way to lead a happy life is . . . work, WORK, and put all your best into it."

He returns to the subject of Gilbert and talks of the man at work. "It was difficult to get the finished article from old Gilbert. I'm talking of a commissioned work. He used to spend weeks, months at a job and then put it away for perhaps a year or so—several years, in some cases, what? This naturally upset a lot of his clients. When he was in Italy he worked day and night on a statue of a nude female representing the spirit of youth. The fellow could never finish it and got very discouraged as he was apt to when a thing didn't turn out as he wanted. Well, Selwyn Brinton, the art critic, called on him in Italy and inquired what was the matter. Gilbert told him he had destroyed the thing with a hammer and there was no trace of it left," shaking his head. "I'm afraid that was Gilbert . . . a good sort, very kind to young people, but very difficult when you gave him a commission. A real big artist, what?"

"Did he ever come back to England?"

"Oh yes. When he was an old man and we'd woken up to the fact that we'd made a mistake in turfing him out. King George V called him back. He was given a studio at Kensington Palace. I'll tell you what he was great at—making little figures, cups, plaques, and *objets d'art* in silver. Some of these were remarkable things and as fine as any Renaissance works."

"Yes, I've seen drawings made for these in the sketch-books I spoke to you about. One album is full of them, drawn in pen and ink, crayon, and some are curiously cut out in bits of paper pasted over a dark background usually painted over in Indian ink."

"I should like to see these sketch-books. They sound very fascinating items."

"They are. The Baron has also got three or four self portraits of him in oil. One in particular is most interesting. It shows Gilbert's head with old roofs of Bruges in the background. The colouring is like a pastel."

"I've never seen any of his paintings. Do you think your friend the Baron would care to swop one or two of these Gilbert works? A friend of mine, Albert Toft, has been collecting his sculpture with the idea of presenting it to the South Kensington Museum. I'd rather like to do my whack and help him to foster the memory of old Gilbert over here."

"I'll do all I can about this, and feel sure the Baron will be pleased to help you in this project."

Walking down the path and shaking some green colour from his coat, Brangwyn turns in my direction and exclaims: "I think I know the very thing the Baron would like for his chapel. A Renaissance statue of Our Lady. It's on the buffet in my dining-room. Yes, yes. We might make a swop with him."

"But it's a very rare piece."

Looking at me angrily he replies: "Rarity. . . . Rarity. Money! Why *must* people look at art in terms of money? I *know* it's a rare piece and I believe the fellow who gave it me paid two hundred quid for it, but what does that matter?"

As we come to the dining-room he pushes the door open and points to the statue. "There it is!" he exclaims. "I want a Gilbert sketch or two and the Baron can have this!"

Brangwyn picks up the statue of Our Lady and takes it to the light. On the way he shoves my papers into the attaché

case on the table and tells me to get home as he walks towards the window.

“My frame-maker Mr. Stiles is coming over to-morrow in a large van to collect the pictures for Bruges. I'd like you to come early, Belleruche. Come in the morning and have some cold chicken before we start work. There'll be a hell of a lot to do. . . .”



XII

THE PROJECT REALISED

THE following morning is a great moment for Ditchling. The whole village seem to know about these 400 pictures by Brangwyn leaving for the Continent. The road leading down to the house is full of inquisitive folk standing around.

As I arrive, there is no need to ring the bell or strike the small brass knocker. The studio doors are flung wide open and a large van blocks up half the road.

People pass up and down and throw curious little peeps into the vast secluded studio of Frank Brangwyn. Two old ladies stop in front of the studio as I turn up and after nosing around and taking a good look at the Master they wander up the road. I happen to overhear their conversation. One old lady says: "Mr. Brangwyn's a hermit and doesn't see anyone." The other replies: "I don't know so much about the hermit but I know he hasn't got time for us ladies!"

Very amused at this little incident I hurry inside ready to tell Brangwyn all about it. He sees me arrive and prevents

me saying anything by yelling out : " There's a lot of work to do and you're late so let's get at the job ! "

Then addressing the workmen, including Mr. Stiles, his devoted framemaker, " who knows just how to tackle the job and see that it's done : Stiles—take care of those large tempera paintings. See that the men don't rub their backsides against them. One of the pictures isn't dry. I put some finishing touches on it yesterday."

Then pointing to me and a pile of water-colours at the same time : " You—— put those in the van. It's a fine day, what ? but we've got to get this job finished. How's your father ? . . . Take off your coat . . . stick it on the chair. . . . Come on, come on, Center—— " he calls out, seeing his assistant arrive with some unframed sketches. " Lay them on the floor. I've got to go through these. Some are rubbish, but there may be one or two to be picked out of the heap that are not too dusty."

" I haven't seen these, Mr. Brangwyn."

" Neither have I ! " he snaps back. Then to Center : " Now, get the next lot ! . . . and *you* might be getting that large roll containing the ' House of Lords ' strip. . . . Better get Belleruche to help you—it's heavy ! "

" But—Mr. Brangwyn . . . I can't . . . "

" Can't what ? " he demands impatiently, and then remembers my accident. " Oh, yes, you're not to lift anything heavy." Then again to Center. " Hold on a bit and I'll give you a hand myself." He takes off his coat and walks briskly away with his assistant.

" But—Mr. Brangwyn ? " I call out.

" What is it ? " he shouts out, continuing his walk.

" I'd like to help you. You'll strain yourself."

" No, I'm used to lugging my stuff about—have done it all my life. *You* can be looking through the sketches and putting aside those you feel might tickle the fancy of the people in Bruges. I'll be back in a moment," he sings out in the distance.

As I look through the drawings, Stiles comes up to me and says : " A wonderful old man, isn't he ? " But I think

the framemaker is glad to have a few moments rest. We sit down and look through the sketches together, but unfortunately, not for long—— Brangwyn is a brisk worker and is already on his way back. The framemaker continues the loading up and I hurry through the sketches for fear of not having the opportunity of seeing them all—if the Master happens to feel that way.

Roger comes running into the studio as we hear energetic footsteps treading heavily on the ground. Then a voice :

“Gently, Center . . . gently, gently—gently, it’s damned heavy this roll !”

Brangwyn is now in sight, and calls out to Stiles : “Give us a hand, old chap ! We’ll take it straight to the van and save two journeys.”

In a somewhat doubled-up manner, holding one end of the roll, he walks out to the van ; then seizing the opportunity of taking some fresh air, he admires the gigantic multi-coloured hollyhocks shooting over the wall on the other side of the road.

“A fine sight, what ?” he exclaims—still holding his end of the roll as the men are getting it into the van. “Look at the blue sky . . . the colour of those flowers, and let’s forget the bloody weight of this roll. . . .”

As soon as the job is completed he walks briskly back into the studio. Then turning to me he says : “Have you been through those sketches ?” just as a voice calls out his name.

“Hullooo ! What is it ?” he asks, walking up to the van. One of the men wants to know whether the mural will be all right with a bit sticking out. “Yes, yes ! But surely we can do better than that.”

He starts showing them how it should be done. Within a few seconds there is no more of the roll to be seen from outside. Satisfied with his effort he returns into his studio but is shaken by the noise of a car passing the house at a great speed.

Facing me suddenly he cries out : “Did you see that ? There’s only *one thing* to do to that fellow !” And he gives a colourful description just as one of the old ladies I saw on

my arrival re-passes the house. "Do you think she heard?" he asks worriedly. I tell him it is unlikely—hoping this will comfort him. "Well, I don't know? And then I wonder why people say Mr. Brangwyn is a terrible man?"

He soon gets over this. In a few moments every one has been given certain jobs to do, and he finds time to light a cigarette and walk around with his hands in his pockets—not idle, but thinking *hard* and keeping his eyes on us all at the same time.

Center is sorting out etchings. Stiles and his men are collecting the water-colours, and I have a very pleasant job of cataloguing the works. Titles are variable. Brangwyn allows me a fair amount of licence. "A nude is always a nude," he says. "Even if she's in her bath. . . . A man's back, always a man's back," and so on . . .

"What's this?" I call out.

"What it looks like, of course."

"Men hitting a chain?"

"No. Call it 'Chain Makers'."

"It's a fine sketch."

"Not bad. A study for the decoration I made for Rockefeller Centre, New York—and so is that . . ." pointing to a large bistre-wash drawing representing a similar subject but with fewer figures.

"And this bridge?"

"*Subbiano*. One of my best water-colours."

"And this?"

"*Kasba, Tangier*. Many of these water-colours are marked behind. Take a look and see!"

A delightful study of a baby's head on an orange-vermilion background comes next. Brangwyn smiles as he sees it. "An early work. Just call it a baby."

"Which way up?" I ask.

We play about with the picture for some time until he decides the way the infant is to be framed. "Like that!" he commands authoritatively.

The next picture is also an early work—rich and mellow in colouring. I tell him I have not seen this one before.

Smiling, he replies: "No. I dug it out the other day after you'd gone. *Oxen ploughing at Assisi.*"

"Very lovely colouring."

"Oh, it's nothing to kick up a song about. It all goes to say that this collection I'm giving to Bruges will cover most of the stages of my life, what? Take this, for instance——" He picks up a small panel: *A Muleteer*. "I did this in Spain when I was about nineteen. How long ago would that be—— Gosh! Is it worth sending?"

"Certainly."

"Well, shove it in the catalogue then!" He fetches a small pastel from behind a screen and brings it to the light. "Now, that's quite a saucy bit of colour—a melon market. How about it?"

"Yes. It's rich."

"All right then. Shove it in!"

The Master now leaves me a few minutes to supervise other work and gives a loud: "How are you getting on, Stiles?" Then he sees the framemaker climb on the van, supporting one end of his large red chalk drawing of *Saint Veronica*. Ah, you're busy. You may find it needs a new mount. Have a look when you get back. See that the worms haven't got into the plywood, otherwise the drawing'll be ————!"

He turns round in case anyone has overheard his language and mutters to himself on his way back to the studio: "One's got to be so careful of talking as soon as you get into the open air. You never know who's behind you. But, most of my best work has been eaten by the worms or destroyed by fire," he concludes with a smile, which gives way to: "How are things going, Belleruche?"

"Nearly finished."

"Good. Sure you can read your writing?"

"I hope so."

"Well, if you can, *I can't*, and I doubt whether the Mayor'll be able to either? I suggest you copy it all out carefully—slowly, taking your time over it."

"When?"

"Now, of course. If there are any queries, you won't

have to ring me up from Bruges. By the way, it was nice hearing your voice last time you were over there. But better cut out the luxury unless it's something really important. Telephoning from the Continent is a costly game."

"I rang up as I wanted to hear your voice."

"So I gathered," he replies, throwing me a quiet, kindly smile—but not for long. "Well, get on with that cataloguing. Time is getting on, and I want to have you all out of the studio so that I can take a bit of rest, what?"

As he finishes talking, a large elaborate Spanish eighteenth-century carved frame arrests my attention. It leans by the door next to two old Dutch ones. I admire its lovely gold leaf and reddish colouring and ask if this belongs to one of his pictures.

"Yes . . . and again No. It was round a Velasquez. But the owner had a new frame made and gave me this one. Stupid, but to my benefit."

"But it's a magnificent one."

"I know it is—and although I've often painted pictures to suit it—each time someone wanted the work I sold it to them without the frame. I told them they were paying for *my* picture and not for a decorative object which in itself was a work of art. Probably (I thought to myself) more interesting than my painting."

"You're too modest, Mr. Brangwyn."

"No, no, it's a beautiful frame, what?"

Then taking another look at the frame, an idea comes into his head. "I know what!" he ejaculates. "If I were to give your father that frame, would he paint a picture something like Manet's *Jardin des Tuileries* . . . a picnic party under a tree with your mother in the foreground pouring out tea?"

"I might ask him."

"Well, if he does, I'll give him the frame."

"I'll mention it to-night."

"Yes, you'd better hurry up as I'd like to get it out of the studio. It's getting in the way of my work." Then he asks suddenly: "How's your cataloguing getting on?"

"Fine," I reply.

"Good. Well, you can sit quiet for five minutes. Read a book or something."

I take his advice and bring out a brochure from my pocket : an analysis of "decadent art" which is being exhibited all over the Continent and shortly coming to this country.

He sees one of the reproductions and asks : "What is it supposed to represent?"

"Abstract art," I tell him.

"Abstract painting? But there isn't such a thing. ABSTRACT ART, HEH! There isn't such a thing, is there? There *can't* be such a thing! A man paints a face as if it had been run over by a steam roller, lop-sided, with the eye on top of the head and the ear under the chin. It isn't ABSTRACT, but CONCRETE, and remains a damned bad job of a face. Abstract?—if so, then there should be no representation of anything, if this is possible! To be logical, a plain canvas would be nearer the mark."

Stiles calls out from the van and wants to know if the pictures are packed tight enough. Brangwyn goes to see. "Yes, yes, that's made a good job of it . . . better put a bit of strong cord round the smaller works to prevent them from shifting."

He takes a look round the studio and exclaims : "They've almost cleared the stuff, thank goodness!" He continues with a story about someone who once called at his studio to look at some pictures.

"I remember having a visit many years ago from a cold-blooded blue-eyed Prussian. He said he wanted to see some pictures. I showed him a Velasquez and a sketch by Rubens. The fellow never moved a hair. Then I showed him some fine specimens of Oriental art, but NO! he remained like a mountain, you couldn't press him . . . nothing! In my wrath, I felt like kicking him, but then I had an idea. I took him upstairs and said : 'I believe I have something that'll interest you after all' and I showed him my w.c."

"Was he amused?"

"The fellow picked up his bowler hat and walked out of

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my house. Poor chap, in a way I felt sorry for him afterwards. He was a collector of surrealist pictures and had become so enslaved by this form of art that he couldn't look at anything else."

The studio is now empty, all but for a few pictures and carved frames piled together in one of the corners. An expression of relief sweeps over Brangwyn's face. He picks up a broom and tells us in a kindly way to clear out. "I want to try to get this studio tidy before to-night. At present it looks like a pigsty, what?" he concludes softly, smiling at everyone and thanking us for our help.



XIII

AN UNFORTUNATE CONTRETEMPS

MRS. PEACOCK rings up the following morning and says the Master is dangerously ill. He has met with a serious accident—strained himself by moving heavy works in the studio. The doctor has ordered him complete rest.

The suspense and anxiety of the following ten days is indescribable. The telephone calls are not reassuring: "Must rest." . . . "Get his mind off his work." . . . "No visitors."

Sir Paul Lambotte already knows about the situation but has not replied to my letter. My only consolation is to work on the Stations of the Cross woodcuts and print some of Brangwyn's original blocks on sixteenth-century papers, which are later to be presented to museums.

A whole week has elapsed without any news from Brussels. Father tells me to be patient. A tap comes at the studio as I am printing a woodcut of some old nuns at Dixmude. I spot a letter under the door with a Belgian stamp. Tearing open the envelope I notice a smaller one inside marked confidential. My curiosity urges me to tackle that one first. It reads:

"Will you please get a written statement from Brangwyn giving you full power to present the 400 pictures to Bruges.

I am writing this so that the wishes of Frank Brangwyn may be fulfilled. . . ."

PAUL LAMBOTTE.

I manage to persuade Mrs. Peacock to allow me to come over for ten minutes. She says no business matters are to be discussed and I must come down when my time is up. "Ten minutes and an embarrassing task to perform," I say to myself as I arrive on the doorstep of the JOINTURE.

Lizzie lets me in. I slip the important letter in my pocket, with a couple of sheets of notepaper, a thick greasy pencil given to me by the inspector at the station, and proceed hurriedly up the stairs.

The Master is stretched out in an armchair surrounded with blankets. His face is drawn and has lost its colouring. Fixing me with feverish eyes that have almost lost their sparkle, he demands: "Well, what is it, what is it? Can't a man be sick without people worrying him . . . what—WHAT? Lizzie tells me you've been ringing up every day—that damn noise gets so irritating that we've had to have the telephone cut off."

"I *had* to see you, Mr. Brangwyn."

"What for?"

"To find out how you were."

"Well, now you've seen me, hurry up and say what there is to say. I'm not supposed to see anyone. I've had a very nasty turn and thought the end had come. Lizzie was wonderful about it and never lost her head." He moves his leg as if in pain. "Oh, I can't get myself in a comfortable position. Fetch me the pillow over there! There's a good chap," and asks me to lay it gently behind his back. "Ah, that's better now."

"Do you want another one?"

"No, but you might bring me that writing block on the chest of drawers. If I feel better I'd like to answer a few letters from people who've inquired after my health. That damn telephone was tinkling all day long; it nearly drove me raving mad. As soon as I'm well enough to go downstairs there'll be so much to do in the studio. . . . I'm afraid to

think of it all." He tries to conceal his pain and gives a forced smile as he stretches out his leg. "I shan't know which job to tackle first."

"There's only one thing that really matters; that's your recovery."

"Yes, I know. But, people who are thoughtful need a little consideration. I *must* answer some of those letters. There are some gentle, kind people whom one finds out rather late."

On the floor, close to the chair, I notice a pencil sketch of a head (presumably, Brangwyn. . . . The expression is one of agony). Although this is only a few strong lines, I pick it up and with his consent slip it into my pocket. A silence follows as he tucks the blankets round his legs. He then asks me to fetch the new block he has been preparing.

"It's over there!" he exclaims pointing to the door. "*Christ falls for the second time*. Bring it here so I can look at it."

He puts on his glasses, asks for the indian ink, and resting the block firmly over his knees, begins to work on it with a fine sable brush. "You want to make these figures fine looking people. Give them an air of dignity and sorrow, something that recalls the tragic episode. Treat the draperies as if you were actually handling them, feeling the weight of the heavy folds resting on your arm. Now, when you're working on the head of Christ, make him look like one filled with sorrow. You've got a fine subject and mind you make the best of it."

Brangwyn dips his brush in the ink every second and runs it across the block . . . at one moment, a head, a hand, a bit of drapery, then again the head, accentuating the nose, the form of the forehead, a little line in the mouth . . . a bit here, a bit there, working quickly, impatiently, nervously, furiously . . . can't listen to any conversation . . . must finish the work . . . and when finished, I stand gasping as he hands over the block.

"Now, see what *you* can do, Belleruche." He then turns the subject to Bruges as he wipes perspiration marks from his forehead. "Have you heard from Lambotte?"

Before answering I think of the Master *so ill* and yet, WORK is all that really matters in his life.

"Have you heard from Lambotte?" he repeats impatiently.

"Yes, only to-day."

"What does he say . . . still keen on the job?"

"Very much so. He says the building is being redecorated. They have painted the outside and removed the old shutters."

"What the hell do they want to do that for? Those old shutters are one of the chief attractions of the building. They give the place a *cachet* and are in keeping with the spirit of Bruges. Why have they done it?" he demands angrily.

"I can't think."

"Well, write immediately and say I'm furious. Tell them to put them up again. If necessary, I'll pay the cost, but the *shutters must go up!*"

"Supposing they've perished?"

"Who cares about that? They looked picturesque on the photos, didn't they?"

"Yes. . . ."

"Well, why move them? What colour have they painted the house?"

"A dull cream."

"That's silly! It'll make the place too conspicuous. The whole charm of this (BRANGWYN) Museum—if ever there is one—is to make it an unpretentious sort of place like a private house. . . . Oh! . . . OH! something must be done about this," he concludes, moving about in his chair and pushing aside one of the blankets.

"Yes! Yes! I'll see to it immediately, Mr. Brangwyn." Anything to prevent him worrying.

"Do so to-night!"

"Certainly. As soon as I get home."

"It's too late to change the cream paint, but the SHUTTERS MUST BE PUT BACK!"

He changes the subject at last and asks whether I've heard from Stiles about the pictures. "Have you been up to London and checked the collection?"

"I'm going to-morrow."

"See that the mounts look well!"

"I will."

"And make another list of everything to send Lambotte. Take a look at that painting the *Afflicted*. If you don't like it, tell Stiles not to send it. Get him to show you the *Slave Market*. I'm sure you'll like that picture. It's a nice colour and'll appeal to the Belgians. They like the robust."

Moving restlessly in his chair he finally finds a comfortable position and rests the weight of his body against one of the arms. "I'm getting to feel tired, he exclaims."

"Would you like me to go?"

"Not for a few moments. Lizzie will let you know when your time is up. How long did she say you could stop?"

"Ten minutes."

"It's gone that, surely?"

"I don't know."

"Oh yes it has. You'd better be getting ready for her call."

I think of Lambotte's letter, and ask hesitatingly: "What are we going to do about this gift to Bruges?"

"Well, it's all settled, isn't it?"

"Yes. I was only thinking what I should do if you hadn't quite recovered at the time. Would I have sufficient authority to act on your behalf?"

"Of course you would. You're my assistant."

"But . . . Mr. Brangwyn," I begin timidly.

"Well, what is it?"

"Would it tire you to give me a written statement, or something that would authorise me to act on your behalf?"

"Well, you've got my word. What more do you want? I'm not dead yet——"

For a time I remain speechless. Brangwyn realises I feel very hurt and tries to ease the situation. "I understand your position, old chap. I also appreciate the thought that rests behind it. You're anxious that my executors shouldn't interfere. . . ."

"Yes. But I know you *will* recover from your accident. I *know* you will."

"Get me the notepaper and something hard to write on."

He picks up the wood block, and using it as a table, begins to write on a sheet of paper I hand him, bearing the following heading: "Brangwyn Exhibition—Hotel Arents—Bruges 1936." A small woodcut of a gargoyle is printed at the top of the sheet.

"How about this?" he asks.

"I empower William de Bellerocche to act for me in all matters regarding the Gift to the Town of Bruges. . . ."

"That's fine. I hope I never have to use it."

"Well, so do I. Let me put a signature," he says, pulling back the paper and striking a flowing FRANK BRANGWYN at the bottom of the page. "That's a knock-out, what?"

As I get ready to leave he asks me to listen to a letter he has drafted for the Mayor of Bruges. "I'll read this out. *Dear Mr. Burgomaster . . . or do you think I should address him as My dear Mayor?*"

"Burgomaster sounds more impressive, perhaps?"

"That's what I feel."

Shaking the letter with his right hand he begins:

"It has caused me profound gratification to learn that you will accept my Gift and will turn this beautiful Hotel Arents into a museum bearing my name and containing for the years to come a representation of my work as a memorial of my love for your great City.

"My pride, though not my gratification, is tempered by my sense of unworthiness to join the company of Jan van Eyck and the many other great men who were proud to call Bruges their Mother.

"However, I can only hope that these works of mine will give to you and to your fellow Townsmen a little of the joy that is mine in this—the most important event of my life.

"Many of the sketches have been inspired by the lovely City which has inspired so many whose names are immortal—and I am most happy that the People of Bruges are willing to accept this offering from one of her Sons, who, though straying far from her unforgettable charms, has always remained grateful for what she is, and has done for him . . .

"Then I mention a bit about you, saying that you know all my wishes as regards hanging the exhibition, and I end up with :

"I shall be with you in spirit at the inauguration of the exhibition, and shall live in the hope that I may (if I am spared at some future time) express to you, and to your Aldermen, a little of what I am feeling now. . . ."

"How's that?" he demands, laying the letter on the floor.

"Very fine."

"Well, I tried to put all my feelings into it. Unfortunately, I'm no poet."

A voice calls from the bottom of the stairs. I leave hurriedly and tell Brangwyn I'll keep him in touch with everything.

"I'll write to you . . ." he calls out as I go down the stairs.



At the Circus lunch . ?

XIV

LETTERS FROM THE MASTER

THE three weeks or so I stay in Bruges are very eventful. Up early every morning and never in bed before midnight. My evenings are spent on the terrace of the Memlinc Hotel or in the lovely garden of Baron Jean van Caloen, full of Greek statues and impressive busts of Roman Emperors—cataloguing the works, preparing my speech and writing to Brangwyn, keeping him in close touch with our activities—and answering his amusing letters, usually accompanied with brilliant little pen sketches of how he imagines everything is . . . and will be taking place.

In one letter, after writing several pages dealing with technical details about the framing of works, the hanging arrangements, the heating for the winter months, the possibility of worms eating through the plywood and attacking the drawings, etc., he ends with a few words of advice on temperance, and sketches a lively pen drawing of myself, rolling drunk on the verge of falling into the Bruges Canal ;

with a tantalising background showing enormous fish . . . a semblance of goldfish or something from the waters of Japan, shooting out from the top.

In a decorative scrawl he writes : *After the Civic Lunch.*

A few days later he sends another letter saying :

I fear there will be no Garden Party. What a pity for the poor people ! It would have been so jolly, taking tea in the beautiful garden. Anyway, one mustn't expect too much. . . .

This is accompanied by a scene representing the outside of the Hotel Arents on a rainy day. Fat "brangwynesque" women are sitting round small tables, protecting themselves with huge umbrellas ; one of the guests is seen making a bolt through one of the windows. In the doorway are caricatures of certain well-known Bruges and Brussels personalities.

Then another follows almost immediately, informing me that the "Deed of Gift" has been sent. The Master is surprised and worried that I have not yet received it.

I got Mrs. Peacock to post it by air mail, he writes.

On the reverse of the letter is a clever drawing of an event—as seen in the Middle Ages. A portly looking Mayor in long robes stands on the right with his Aldermen and other civic dignitaries around him. All eyes are concentrated on the dark, youthful-looking Page Boy, kneeling down and handing the Mayor a large scroll with all kinds of impressive seals hanging from the end.

Bellerocbe handing over the Deed, is written underneath.

These letters—and there are many—bring us infinite joy. I say *us* as, although Brangwyn has asked me *not* to show them, the rumour soon gets round that I am receiving these pen sketches. The Mayor, when inviting me to a conference at the Town Hall, always ends by saying : "And if you have any more Brangwyn drawings—bring them over. We *love* seeing them." And by jove ! they *do*. Even from tiny figures, the characteristics of Sir Paul Lambotte, Louis Reckelbus, and the Mayor are picked out with amusement as we discuss official matters.

There is enough sense of humour at the Town Hall not to take offence. Even if Brangwyn's pen ran at times too fast



"TEA AT THE HOTEL ARENTS, 1936."

and made one of the City Fathers look as if he suffered from violent toothache or middle-age spread.

As everything is taking shape, the pictures hung, invitations sent out, leading articles in the Press announcing the opening ceremony for July 29th, 1936, Brangwyn causes havoc in Bruges. He writes, saying that he wishes to change his name. Lambotte is indignant and thinks it is a great mistake; the Mayor and Aldermen laugh and say: "If it gives him satisfaction, let him do so," and I am cross, as it means a lot of unnecessary work.

He sends an express letter:

I want from now on to be known by my real name which is François and not Frank. All documents, references in catalogues and tributes at the opening ceremony should be made out as such. This wish of mine must be respected. If you care to confirm this for yourself, take a little stroll to the Hotel de Ville and look up my birth certificate.

Yours sincerely,

"FRANCOIS BRANGWYN."

Personal curiosity makes me call at the Hotel de Ville. The person in charge fails to understand the purpose of my visit and tells me it will take a day to find the book with the Master's birth certificate.

I return the following morning and see a large volume on the counter. The attendant blows sixty-nine years of dust in my direction and opens the book. "Voilà . . . Monsieur" he exclaims pointing to the following inscription:

"GUILLAUME FRANCOIS BRANGWYN, NE, RUE
DU VIEUX BOURG LE 12 MAI 1867."

have you as having a good time
 you are sure
 (underneath)



XV

BRANGWYN HONOURED

A CURIOUS feeling enters my head as I drive down in the bus to Ditchling. How can a man living so simply in his country home—away from everyone—leading the life of a recluse, stir up so much noise in Belgium and in the international Press?

Then I think of the words of the veteran French art critic, Camille Mauclair, when visiting the newly founded Brangwyn Museum in Bruges:

"Such joys and emotions can only be imparted by the hand of a Genius. BRANGWYN is a GENIUS and a healthy one who glorifies reality by his imagination—transforming it at one moment to dramatic and then to lyrical . . ."

"Yes, this is true," I say to myself as I knock on the door of the JOINTURE with the satisfaction of someone who has fulfilled a mission . . . a mission which has been a joy.

Mrs. Peacock lets me in. She tells me the Master is in the garden talking to Mr. Chatfield the gardener. I hand her a large purpley-blue hydrangea bought at the Bruges market and a few specimens of biscuits recommended by one of the Bruges officials, *pains aux amandes* and *pains à la greque* which crunch in your mouth. Thanking me, she tells me to go into the garden; in the meantime she will water the plant.

"Mr. Brangwyn—" I call out at the top of my voice.
 "Where are you?"

"Hullo! Hullooo! Who is it?"

I see him standing on the lawn a few yards away talking to his gardener who is holding on to a wooden barrow.

"It's you—Belleruche!"

"Yes. How are you?"

"Oh, so so. Still a little groggy on the legs after my accident, but very happy. It's wonderful news. I feel like a 'Son of Flanders'."

"You're a Citizen of Honour of Bruges."

"What? Have they made *me* one?"

"Yes."

"But that's a *rare* honour."

"Only accorded to three people (I believe) in this century. You're the third. The Mayor of Bruges is coming over to bring you the Illuminated Parchment. He is coming officially, accompanied by his Aldermen and Town Clerk."

"No!"

"Yes! And King Leopold has made you a *Grand Officier de l'Ordre de Léopold*. This distinction will be brought to you by Sir Paul Lambotte or the Belgian Ambassador, Baron de Cartier de Marchienne."

Brangwyn becomes very embarrassed and self-conscious. He casts his eyes on the ground and changes the subject by asking: "What have you got in there?" pointing to a parcel I am carrying.

"That's a souvenir for you from the Town Clerk. It's a terra-cotta cat made in Bruges."

"A priceless looking affair, what? Oh, there's something written underneath. Did you know?"

"Yes, he wrote it in front of me."

Perching his glasses halfway up his nose he reads aloud:

*"May this little Flemish Cat that fled my home to dwell
 in yours fully express my admiration, my gratefulness and
 friendship and gently say about this all the deep-felt words I
 cannot speak."*

"First chop! These Flemings who are supposed to be

phlegmatic, are at heart full of feeling and poetry. Tell me, *how* are the Bruges folk ? ”

“ Fine. Many of them want to see you. I shouldn’t be surprised to see a whole party of them on your lawn.”

“ Well, mind you let me know in good time so that Lizzie can fix up some grub. We want to give them a real feast.”

“ It’s *you* they want to see. They would like to shake hands with the person who has enriched their city with pictures they love.”

“ It moves me greatly. I feel very honoured.”

“ They *also* feel honoured. Your museum is visited over and over again by the same people. They have made the building their home. Many of them bring sandwiches and sit in front of the pictures. The day after the museum was inaugurated I met an old Bruges resident who asked me if I would care to have an *Export* (Belgian beer) with him at the SALLE BRANGWYN. I told him we had not yet fixed up drinking facilities but that I would mention this to you and no doubt you would find the idea reasonable. The man laughed and said he was referring to a café that had just been opened and christened with your name.”

“ Well, I’m dashed ! Did you see the place ? ”

“ Yes. It’s only a few yards from the museum.”

“ Has the proprietor got any pictures on the walls ? ”

“ Not yet.”

“ Well, I’ll give you something to take over. Some nice coloured reproductions and a small sketch for his private sitting-room.”

“ They will all come to you, if you do this.”

“ Why not ? ” he exclaims, smiling and looking supremely happy.

I seize the opportunity of asking him to pose for some photographs. “ King Leopold is going to visit your museum and the Belgian papers would like a recent photograph of you.”

“ What ? Is the King going to see my pictures ? ”

“ Yes. He will visit the museum.”

“ Well, what’s my photograph got to do with it ? ”



THE BURGOMASTER OF BRUGES INSPECTS BRANGWYN'S VEGETABLES.

"Just a personal touch, Mr. Brangwyn."

After a good deal of persuasion he condescends. "Oh, all right then! But if you *must* take a photo, let's make it a family group. We'll get you and Chatfield into it."

Center arrives at the right moment and is asked to take over the camera. Brangwyn tells him he wants the photo to look as natural as possible. . . . "As natural as any photograph can be, what? The idea is that Chatfield has been collecting weeds from the lawn and putting them in his barrow, and the three of us—Belleruche, Chatfield and myself are looking at them."

"But *you* must be looking at the camera, Mr. Brangwyn," I interrupt.

"No! That'll be too posy."

He places us in our appropriate positions and tells Center he'll give the signal. "Now. . . . Everyone ready?" he calls out, throwing a hasty glance in our direction. "What the HELL are you looking at the camera for, Belleruche—and *you* Chatfield! . . . concentrate on the job—both of you, will you!"

We start all over again.

"Everyone ready? Fire ahead, Center!"

As soon as the click goes, Brangwyn switches round in our direction, catching the gardener and myself grinning at the camera. "Right! that'll be a wash out! and I'm not posing any more! Let's go and sit over there on the seat and you can tell me about the opening ceremony. This waste of time fooling about in front of a camera is stupid."

He blackens the mouth-end of a cigarette, singeing it with a match, sticks it in his lips and sets light to the other end.

"Why do you do that?"

"To kill the germs. I've seen certain types of fags turned out on the Continent, and believe me . . . well, well, we'll say no more about it. Tell me. How did your speech go off?"

"All right, so I was told. I delivered it in French and English. Unfortunately, I made a small *faux pas* when it was over."

"Oh, how's that?"

"The official standing on my right gave an impressive oration in Flemish and when it was over I clapped vigorously. Sir Paul Lambotte, who was on my left, tapped me discreetly on the shoulder and said: 'Shu! Shu! The Minister is replying to *your* speech.' I felt an awful fool. But the Father Abbot who was standing in the front row gave me an understanding nod. His large gold cross was glittering in the sun.

"Then Lambotte made a fine speech in French, followed by one from the Mayor in Flemish. The ceremony was most impressive. Notabilities had turned up from all over Belgium. Politicians, writers, artists, museum officials, and high dignitaries of the Church. The Cardinal of Bruges was there standing in his scarlet robes."

"You seem to have been in the cream of society, what?"

"I certainly was. Everyone who really mattered was somewhere in the hall. I was glad to see several monks in the background. When the speeches were over I read your telegram. The assembly was overwhelmed when they heard about the Gift. I wish you'd been there to see their enthusiasm."

"I was sitting in my dining-room thinking of you all and wishing that my mother and father could have been there. My spirit was over there. It was a great moment in my life."

"Everyone asked whether there was any chance of your coming to Bruges. I knew how they felt about it and had to pretend that you might be coming over. It would have been a great disappointment had I not given them some sort of hope."

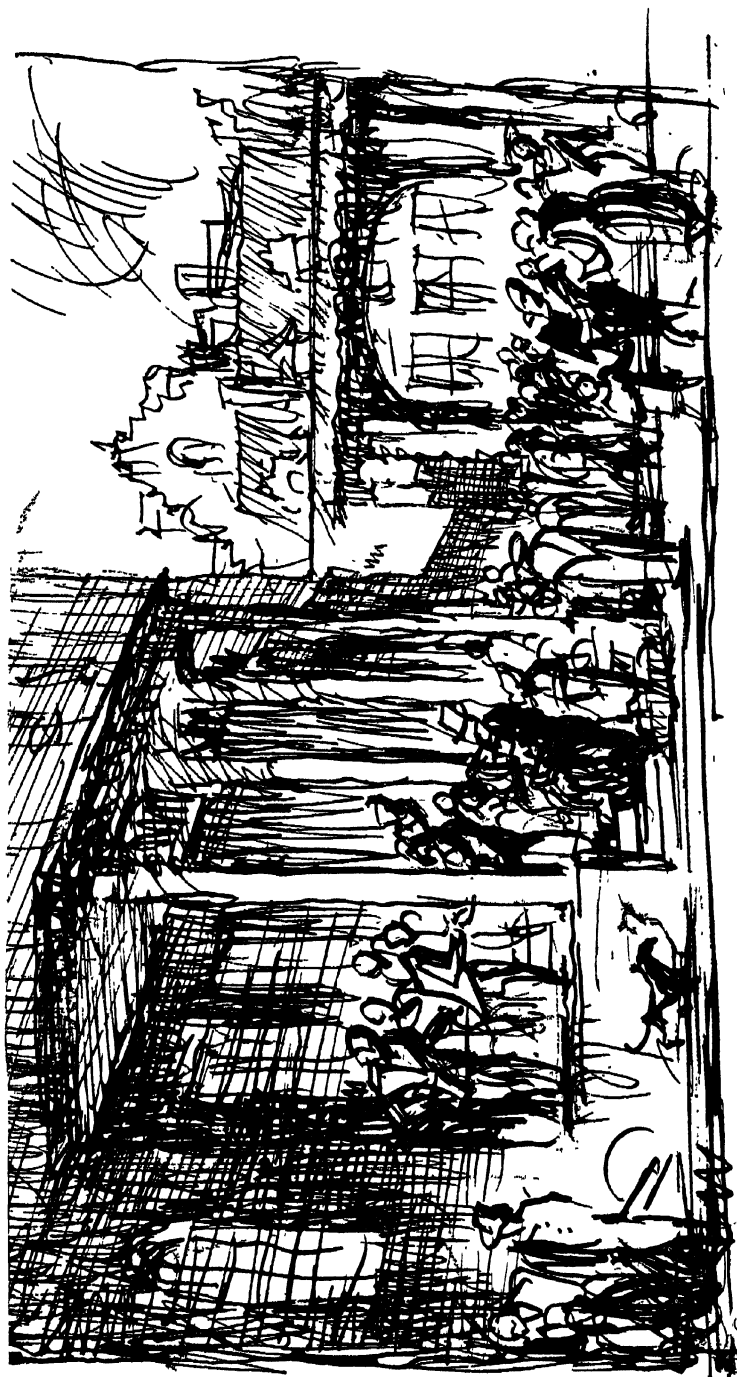
"Quite. How did the works look?"

"Fine."

"Rather sketchy I fear?"

"No. Have a look at the Press cuttings?"





“ INAUGURATION OF THE BRANGWYN MUSEUM, JULY, 1936.”

I spread masses of them on the table, many bearing large black headlines . . .

BRANGWYN RETOURNE A SA VILLE NATALE

UN GENIE NE A BRUGES

BRANGWYN PEINTRE DE L'HOMME AU TRAVAIL

Throwing a hasty glance at the cuttings he says they are very nice but the thing that really matters for him is to know that the works are appreciated.

"Now that this job has come off I shall spend the rest of my old days thinking of Bruges and how I can add to and improve this collection. I want to design those windows for the Chapter Room. And there'll be lots of little things we can do to the building. You must take measurements of certain panels where you think a bit of mural would look well."

"Yes. I have already made notes of all this."

"Well, you'd better let me have them while I'm still alive to do the stuff. What happened at the monastery? Did they get the Saint Aidan cartoons up?"

"Yes. It was quite an adventure. The monks at first were getting anxious about them. The day before the opening they told me that the cartoons had only just arrived. The Abbot rang up to ask if I would help to see that they were put up in the right place. He said a car would be coming from the monastery to collect the works and asked whether I'd wait for it in the Grande Place. He said he'd put a monk inside so I should recognise it. When I arrived at the monastery I was greeted by Père Lefèvre—you know, the monk who reproduced your Stations of the Cross in *l'Artisan Liturgique*. He had grown an impressive beard. At first, I never recognised him."

"Ha! Ha-aaa! It's wonderful what you can do in a monastery. A fine beard to order, what?" He tugs at his own beard. "Now mine has never come up to expectations. It's not full enough. Some of these monks have real beauties! Strong, wiry looking affairs that remind one of the Middle Ages."

"Reckelbus has a good one."

"Ah yes. I suppose it must be snow white by now. When I first knew him it was a rich black."

"It's very white."

"He must look fine with it."

"Yes. But yours is all right. It's very distinguished looking."

He pulls it into a point. "Well, that's enough about beards! You were telling me about the cartoons?"

Yes. After the museum ceremony was over, the corporation gave us a delicious tea in the Musée Communal with the Van Eycks and Roger van der Weydens adorning the walls. Later we went to the monastery to inspect the murals. Many of us went over in a large char-a-banc provided by the monks. The cartoons were hung in the large hall. They appeared enormous. As we stood admiring them the Abbot delivered a fine tribute to you and your work. He spoke of you as being appointed by GOD to create these works. I have here a few notes from his speech."

"Read them out, will you?"

"It's only part of it."

"All right. Read what you have."

"*'Silent Bruges was the very spot where Frank Brangwyn's eyes saw the light for the first time. In kind remembrance, he has made a Royal Gift to our Abbey of Saint Andrew. We cannot but be grateful to him and return our warmest thanks. The Poet of Old said: . . . 'Non omnis moriar' . . . which I venture to translate: 'I shall not be quite forgotten.' For every time the monks come to have their meals they will remember the Master who has displayed on these walls the life of the humble monks of olden time.'*"

"*'In the refectory, many prayers are said, many thanks given . . . Frank Brangwyn's paintings: the fruits of his heart and his brain will remain for ever as an incentive to charity. . . .'*"

Brangwyn is so moved by this tribute that he remains speechless. When he speaks again his voice is full of humility and respect. He thinks of the Abbot and wonders whether his words are not too fine for the few works he has presented to the monastery.

"I could have given them so many paintings if I'd known about this a few years ago. They could have had some of my finest works."

"But the Abbot was speaking about the whole output of your life's work . . . not only about the *Saint Aidan* cartoons."

"Yes. I know. But when you feel that your work brings so much joy to people, it makes you wonder whether you shouldn't have thought a little more about them earlier on in life. Anyway, if the Almighty permits, I hope to do a lot of work for the monastery."

"I'll tell the Abbot when I see him."

"Yes. Ask him what he wants, and I'll do it."

I then tell Brangwyn what happened when the Abbot had finished his oration. "We had refreshments served to us by the monks. Red wine was generously poured into our glasses and a large assortment of cakes was passed round on plates. An old Bruges resident approached me as I was talking to the Abbot and said what a fine monk I'd make."

"Well, I've told you that myself."

"Maybe. But he might have been more discreet and not shouted it all over the place."

"He wanted to pay you a compliment."

"I felt most embarrassed at the time."

"Anyway, all this monastic episode has been a wonderful experience in your life. Later on, you'll look back on all these memories and perhaps write about them . . ."

"I have already done so."

"What? When you were over there?"

"Yes. Also recording my conversations with you from the first day I had the privilege and joy of meeting you."



"What do you say? You've recorded all our conversations. . . . Everything we've said, discussed, and done together?"

"Yes. In these little notebooks—look!"

"You should not have done this. Our talks were rather free and not for others to hear. If published, such remarks may give quite the wrong impression."

He picks up a small blue scribbling tablet and finds a bit about an object I saw in his studio. He reads aloud :

"What's this, Mr. Brangwyn ?

"An old Turban.

"It's a lovely material.

"Yes . . . don't touch it ; leave the damn thing alone. It's full of germs ! . . . go and wash your hands and don't touch my door knobs !

"But it seems clean ?

"If you lift it—the bloody thing'll collapse. It's all gone rotten—can't you see ? I keep it there as a note of colour. In the afternoon, I watch the sun pouring over it . . . the colour is superb—one of those indescribable Oriental shades—ORANGE, I sometimes think it is—and when I begin to paint it . . . I'm damned if I know what the colour is. . . ."

Throwing the notebook on the table he looks at me with a curious expression. He looks right through me. It's not anger, and yet I don't quite like it. It puzzles me. Then he speaks, closing his eyes and slowly raising his right eyebrow :

"So that's what your little game has been all these years. Had I realised this I shouldn't have been quite so free in my remarks. Making notes to write a book about F.B.—what ?"

"Making notes so that I shall always remember some of the happiest moments of my life, Mr. Brangwyn."



"BELLERUCHE HANDING OVER THE DEED."

XVI

AN APPRECIATION OF BELGIAN ART

by

Sir Frank Brangwyn, R.A.

“ So much has been written about the Art of Belgium that I feel there is very little I am competent to add. If I were asked, however, to name its peculiarly distinctive qualities, I would point to its impressive sanity, its incorruptible sincerity.

The reason is not far to find. Belgian art has always rested on the life of the soil, home and domesticity. It has reflected the honest sympathy the artist feels. It has cherished an unflagging record for tradition and customs. It possesses alike simplicity and integrity. Its honesty has taken the form of a realistic outlook on life, happily free from the grosser forms of doubt and pessimism, that permits of a true picture of the people in their natural environment. The Belgian artists have excelled in revealing the drama and beauty of the simplicity of daily life, or what passes for the commonplace to men without vision. In no work is this fine flavour of domesticity more strongly shown than in the pictures of Van Eyck, Brueghel and their contemporaries. Even Rubens and Jordaens in those grandiose flights into mythology kept close to the earth, filling their canvases with every human god and goddess, and all the good solid things of life.

They who look carefully will be impressed by the fact that no variety of subject can conceal this love of the faith and home. They have led the way to showing the beauties of industry, the cloister and the hearth, which has had a profound influence on the art of the world.

Noble is art assuredly based on a clear eye to the conception of the elementary constituents of life ; the struggles and disappointments, the simple joys and sorrows, the indomitable courage and fortitude of which life, the life of man is composed.”

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